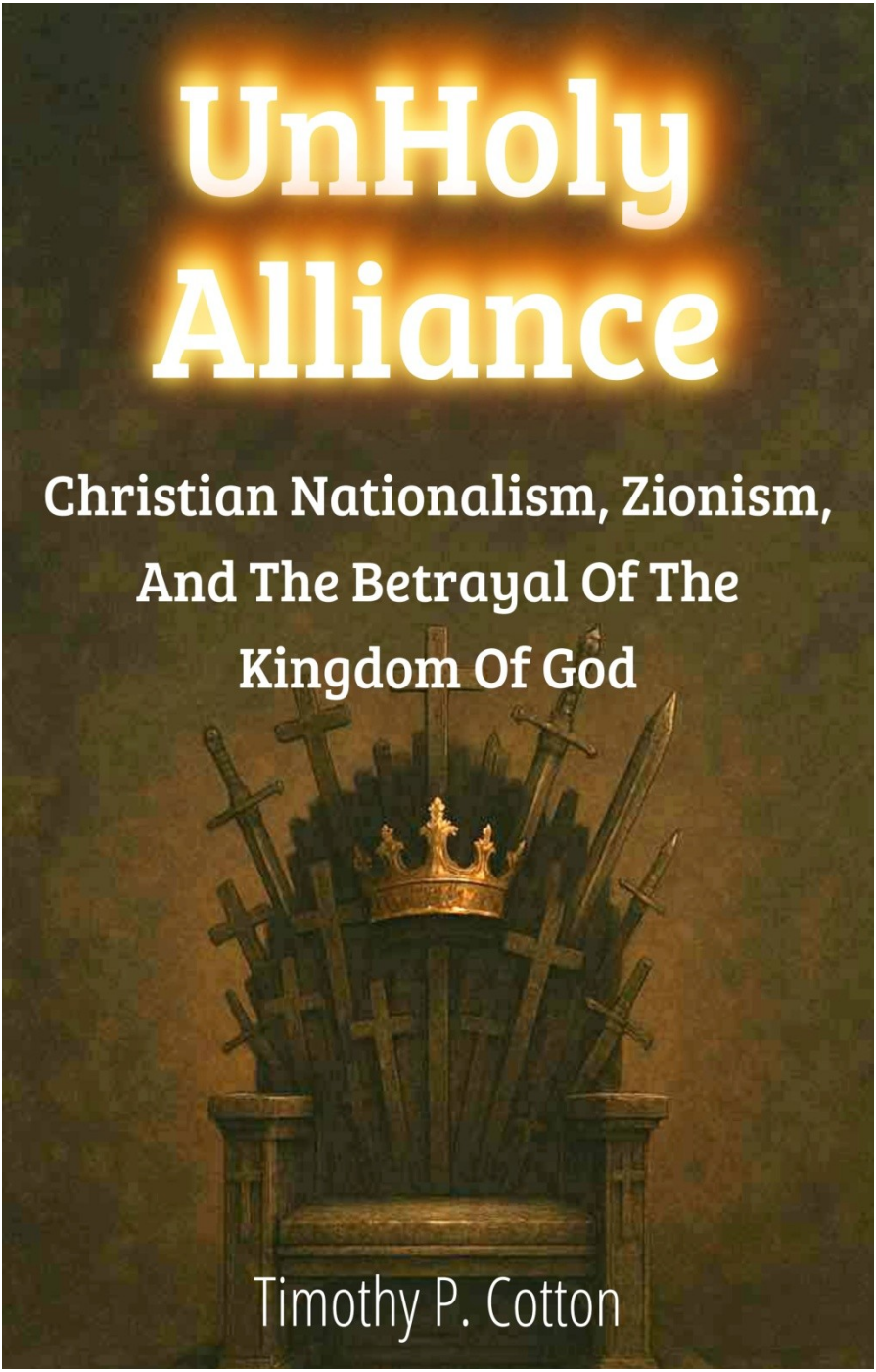
UnHoly
Alliance
Christian Nationalism, Zionism,
And The Betrayal Of The
Kingdom Of God
Timothy P. Cotton

UNHOLY ALLIANCE

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Unholy Alliance:
Christian Nationalism, Zionism, and the Betrayal of the Kingdom of God

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A publication of Truth and Way Ministries

www.truthandway.org
Orange, VA

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ISBN: 9798291978450

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025916162

Dedicated to the Glory of God,

To my wife Christine,

To my children Brian and Caitlin,

and my grandchildren Artemis, Maverick, and Riley

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Unholy Alliance

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is accomplished with the recognition of all of the people throughout my life who have encouraged me to not blindly accept the norm, to always ask why, and to challenge everything we are told in search of the truth; and especially those who tolerated me endeavoring to do so.

It is especially important that I acknowledge the work of theologians Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann whose writings and insights have both inspired and informed this book.

I also want to acknowledge the Rev. Dr. Eric J. Titus,
ever my pastor.

PREFATORY NOTE

A Word About "the Church"

Throughout this book, the term "Church" is used frequently- but it is important to understand that we do not use it to refer to any single denomination, institution, congregation, or national expression of Christianity. We are not targeting a particular church body, nor are we aligning ourselves with one.

Instead, "Church: refers to the universal community of those who follow Jesus Christ- past, present, future. It is not confined by geography, culture, tradition, or political affiliation. It transcends the boundaries of institutional religion and exists wherever the Spirit of Christ is alive in the lives of people committed to his way of love, justice, peace, and truth.

At times, this book will critique various forms of imperial Christianity, Christian nationalism, and state-aligned religion that have taken root throughout history. When we speak of "the Church" in tension with these movements, we are naming a contrast between the faithful, liberating body of Christ and its co-option by empire, power, and violence. The goal is not to condemn the Church, but to call it back to its original vocation: to be a witness to the kingdom of Gog, not a servant of the kingdoms of this world.

Let this serve as a reminder that the true Church is not identical with any empire, flag, or ideology- it belongs to Christ alone.

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INTRODUCTION:
The Convergence We Ignore

There is a lie so deeply woven into the fabric of modern Christianity that many no longer see it as a lie. It is the belief that God has chosen certain nations, certain peoples, and certain lands to carry out his purposes through political power and military strength. It is the conviction that the kingdom of God advances through legislation, borders, armies, and flags. It is a lie that has birthed two powerful movements: Christian Nationalism and Zionism.

These are not identical ideologies. One takes shape in the patriotic religion of the United States, where Christianity is weaponized to preserve power and cultural dominance. The other takes form in the religious-political fusion of Zionism, where a modern nation-state is upheld as the fulfillment of ancient promises. And yet, beneath their differences, they share the same DNA. Both clothe themselves in biblical language, claiming divine authority for their political ambitions. Both idolize land and law while marginalizing grace. Both present themselves as faithful expressions of scripture, and both betray the gospel of Jesus Christ. This book is about that betrayal.

To understand the unholy alliance between Christian Nationalism and Zionism, we must look

beyond contemporary politics. We must trace these ideologies to their historical roots and uncover how they emerged, separately and together, in the modern world, especially within the context of American Christianity. But we must confront the theological corruption at the heart of it all: the transformation of Christianity from a movement of the crucified into a mechanism of empire.

The seeds of Christian nationalism were sown long before the rise of modern America. They were planted in the fourth century, when the Roman Empire co-opted Christianity. What had begun as a subversive, suffering faith- a kingdom not of this world- suddenly was crowned with imperial gold. Constantine's conversion marked the beginning of a catastrophic fusion: Christianity was no longer a community of the cross, but an institution of power. The gospel was repurposed to sanctify war, expand empire, and legitimize rulers. This imperial Christianity laid the foundation for every nationalist theology that would follow.

Zionism, too, finds its modern expression in a world reshaped by empire. Born in response to centuries of anti-Semitism, political Zionism offered the Jewish people a state, a land, and a renewed national identity. But when embraced by Christians, especially American evangelicals, it was repurposed into a theology that turns

prophecy into politics and promises into borders. This new Zionism became fused with Christian nationalism, forming a political-religious force that justifies occupation, violence, and injustices in the name of God.

What we now face is not just a political crisis but a theological one. Christian nationalism and Zionism are not fringe distortions- they have become central pillars of much modern theology, especially in the West. They shape how millions of Christians read the bible, understand salvation, view the world, and define the mission of the church.

This book will expose these movements for what they are: counter-gospels rooted in empire, not the cross. Drawing on the theology of Jurgen Moltmann, Karl Barth, and others, we will confront these ideologies not only historically and politically, but theologically, examining how they have betrayed Christ, distorted the church, and harmed countless lives.

But this book is not merely a critique. It is also a call- a call to reclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ from the grip of empire. It is a summons to return to the crucified God, whose kingdom comes not through might or nationalism, but through grace, suffering love, and resurrection hope.

There is another way. But we must first tear down the idols we have built in God’s name.

PART I: Nationalism as Heresy

Chapter 1
When God Becomes a Flag

Christianity Before Empire: A Marginal Faith of Resistance

Before Christianity ever became a religion of empires, it was a threat to them.

In the first three centuries after Christ, the Christian movement emerged not as a dominant force but as a persecuted community. It had no temples, no armies, no sacred lands, and no

political representation. What it did have was a crucified and risen Messiah- a Jewish peasant executed by Rome as an enemy of the state. The early Christians worshipped this man as Lord, and by doing so, they announced a loyalty that threatened every political order built on violence, idolatry, and control.

When the apostles proclaimed “Jesus is Lord,” they were not offering a safe spiritual truth to be recited in worship. They were issuing a direct challenge to the empire, where the title “Lord” belonged to Caesar alone. The gospel was not an invitation to a private religion- it was the declaration that the reign of God had broken into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, a reign that stood in radical contrast to the power and values of Rome.

This early Christian faith was not only apolitical in the modern sense- it was anti-imperial. Christians refused to burn incense to the emperor, refused to serve in the Roman army, and refused to participate in the civic religion that held the empire together. Their allegiance was to another kingdom, one not of this world, and their bodies often bore the cost of that allegiance.

The book of Acts represents a picture of the church as a community shaped by resurrection hope and resistance. The first believers shared their possessions, cared for the poor, and refused

to hoard power. They gathered in homes, not temples. They prayed for their enemies, not their victory. They suffered willingly, imitating the crucified Christ. These were not the actions of empire-builders. They were signs of a new world breaking in- a kingdom whose power was made perfect in weakness.

Theologian Jurgen Moltmann describes the early church as a “messianic fellowship”- a community of those who had been touched by the resurrection and who now lived in the tension between the old world of empire and the new creation of God. Their hope was not in political reform or military conquest, but in the return of Christ and the full arrival of God’s kingdom. They were strangers and exiles, citizens of a kingdom not built by human hands.

This vision of the church was fundamentally incompatible with the imperial order. Rome tolerated many religions as long as they did not undermine social stability or political loyalty. But Christianity, by its very nature, did both. It offered no sacrifices to the gods of the state. It honored no national boundaries. It proclaimed that the last would be first and the meek would inherit the earth. It was not interested in preserving power but in embodying a cruciform love that disarmed it.

The early church fathers understood this tension. Writers like Tertullian and Origen insisted that Christians could not serve in the military or participate in the violence of the state. The kingdom of God, they believed, was incompatible with the coercive structures of empire. The church was to be a living alternative- a people who bore witness to Christ by how they lived, suffered, and forgave. Their identity was shaped by baptism, not by national allegiance; by the table of the Lord, not by the sword of Caesar.

This marginal, prophetic posture gave the church its power, not the power to rule, but the power to bear witness. It was not a power of dominance, but of endurance. And it was precisely this witness that drew people to the faith. In a world rued by fear and violence, here was a community marked by love, equality, and hope. Women, slaves, the poor, and the outcast found dignity and belonging in the church. It was not perfect, but it was different- a counter-society that pointed toward a different future.

But this countercultural identity would not last. As the church grew, it became increasingly attractive to those in power. And when Constantine claimed the name of Christ and brought the church under imperial protection, everything changed. What had been a faith of resistance became a tool of legitimacy. What had

been cruciform became triumphant. The tables would soon be turned, and the persecuted would become the powerful.

The church's first three centuries must be remembered not simply as a romanticized past, but as a prophetic standard. They remind us that Christianity was never meant to be national, imperial, or violent. It was born in the shadow of the empire, but it refused to mirror it. Its Lord was not seated on a throne but nailed to a cross.

To understand the danger of Christian nationalism, we must begin here- with a church that lived as strangers in the world, not rulers of it, with a gospel that toppled kingdoms not by violence, but by resurrection. It was a gospel of a crucified God who called his people not to take up arms, but to take up their cross.

This is the Christianity that was dethroned the moment it was crowned.

Constantine and the Fall of the Crucified Church

The most consequential moment in Christian history after the resurrection may have come in the year 313 AD. It was not marked by a martyrdom, a council, or a theological breakthrough. It came in the form of an edict- The Edict of Milan- issued by the Roman emperors Constantine and Licinius, proclaiming religious

tolerance for Christianity across the empire. For the first time, the once-outlawed faith of a crucified Messiah had the protection of the most powerful political force in the world. It was a turning point that would transform Christianity forever.

The Roman Empire had long viewed the church with suspicion, if not hostility. Christians were persecuted not simply because they were different, but because they refused to participate in the civic cult that bound Roman society together. By refusing to honor the emperor as divine and by pledging allegiance to another Lord, Christians were perceived as politically dangerous. The empire was not merely tolerant of multiple gods- it was built on religious pluralism so long as every religion upheld the imperial order. The problem with Christianity was not that it worshipped Jesus, but that it refused to worship Caesar. That all changed with Constantine.

The story of Constantine's conversion is shrouded in legend and theological myth-making. According to the account of Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, Constantine received a vision of the cross in the sky before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312. The words he reportedly saw- in hoc signo vinces ("in this sign you will conquer")- would come to define a new era of imperial Christianity. Whether or not the vision occurred as

described, Constantine won the battles, claimed divine favor through Christ, and positioned himself as the protector of the church. But what kind of protection was this?

Under Constantine, Christianity gained unprecedented privileges: bishops were given political authority, churches were exempted from taxes, and imperial money funded the construction of basilicas. The church went from a persecuted minority to a favored institution in a single generation. What had once been a faith carried by the poor and oppressed now gained the favor of emperors, the wealth of the state, and a place in the halls of power. It was a monumental gain… and a devastating loss.

The church did not simply gain influence. It gave up its identity. The crucified church became the imperial church. The theology of the martyrs gave way to the theology of victory. The suffering Christ was recast as the heavenly conqueror. Christian symbols were now engraved on shields and standards. The cross- once a sign of God’s self-giving love- was now a battle emblem.

In the Constantinian settlement, the church became entangled with the logic of empire: strength, control, legitimacy, and law. Christianity was no longer a prophetic witness to a kingdom not of this world- it became an ideological arm of the empire. Doctrine now served not only truth but

unity. Bishops wielded imperial power. Heresy became treason. And theological disputes were resolved not in the Spirit of Christ but under the shadow of imperial authority.

Eusebius, writing in praise of Constantine, described him in messianic terms- as a “bishop of bishops,” chosen by God to bring peace to the world and unity to the church. In this new vision of history, the reign of Christ and the reign of Rome had converged; Rome was no longer Babylon; it had become the New Jerusalem. Empire was no longer the enemy of the gospel- it was now its vehicle. But this was not the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was its distortion.

Where Jesus had refused political power and embraced the cross, Constantine’s Christianity embraced political power and redefined the cross. Where Jesus had rejected the sword and called his followers to turn the other cheek, Constantine’s church blessed the sword and declared wars in his name. The Sermon on the Mount was replaced by imperial law. The poor in spirit were replaced by the politically loyal.

This merger of church and empire marked what theologians often call the “Constantinian shift.” It was not a single event, but a gradual transformation from a cruciform, apocalyptic movement into a state religion. Over time, this shift would lead to the emergence of Christendom-

the fusion of Christian identity with territorial control, military power, and cultural hegemony. It would justify crusades, colonization, inquisitions, and the suppression of dissent. But it began with a seduction; the offer of safety, influence, and authority in exchange for prophetic silence.

What is often missed in modern Christian memory is that the early church did not celebrate Constantine as a hero. Many believers continued to distrust the alignment of Christ with Caesar. Some saw it as a betrayal of the gospel. Monastic movements began to rise, not in pursuit of legalism, but in protest. They sought to preserve the radical witness of the gospel apart from the trappings of imperial power. In the desert, far from the cities and courts, Christians tried to keep the fire of faith alive- not a faith of empire, but of the crucified and risen Lord.

Yet, over time, the Constantinian order prevailed. The church became a cultural given. Baptism became a mark of citizenship. Theology was drafted in service to the state. And while persecution had ended, a deeper danger had taken its place; the gospel itself was being redefined.

The tragedy of Constantine is not simply political. It is theological. When the church gains the sword, it loses the cross. When it is enthroned by emperors, it ceases to follow the one who had

no place to lay his head. The Constantinian church traded witness for security, truth for influence, and crucifixion for conquest.

This transformation laid the groundwork for everything that would come: the Holy Roman Empire, the Christian colonization of the Americas, the blending of church, and state in modern democracies and the rise of Christian Zionism and nationalism. What began as a moment of imperial protection became the long history of a church at the service of power.

To understand how Zionism and Christian nationalism gained theological legitimacy, we must first see how the church itself became an empire. It did not begin in 1948, nor in 1776. It began when the followers of the crucified Christ knelt before Caesar and called it a blessing.

Theology Remade in the Image of Empire

The fusion of Christianity and empire did not simply alter the church's external posture- it reshaped its soul. As Christianity ascended into political power, its theology was gradually remade to reflect the structures, symbols, and ambitions of imperial rule. The God who had revealed himself in weakness and self-giving love was re-imagined in terms of glory, control, and sovereignty- not as a suffering servant, but as a cosmic emperor enthroned above the nations.

At the center of this shift was a new image of Christ: The Pantokrator.

In early Christian art, Jesus was often depicted as the Good Shepherd- gentle, approachable, clothed in humility. But as the church gained imperial status, this image was replaced by the Pantokrator, the almighty ruler of the cosmos. Seated on a throne, surrounded by symbols of dominion, Christ became a mirror of Caesar. He was still Savior, but now also Judge, Lawgiver, and Emperor. The crucified one was enthroned in imperial splendor.

This shift in iconography reflected a deeper theological realignment. The emphasis of the gospel turned from the subversive grace on the cross to the triumph of divine power. The crucifixion was no longer primarily a revelation of God’s self-giving love but a mechanism of legal satisfaction, a necessary step in God's plan to assert divine justice and cosmic order. Christ’s weakness was no longer central- it was a brief interlude before the reassertion of might. This theology had political consequences.

If God’s reign was one of sovereign control and legal order, then earthly rulers who established order and enforced law could be seen as agents of God. Power itself became morally neutral- or even divinely sanctioned- so long as it served the purpose of stability and unity. The sword was no

longer contrary to the gospel but became its ally. Empire became not an enemy of the kingdom of God, but its instrument. One of the most influential voices in this transition was Augustine.

Writing in the wake of Rome's decline, Augustine's City of God offered a theological framework that would shape Christian imagination for centuries. He distinguished between the "City of God" and the "City of Man"- two orders running through history, one oriented toward divine love and the other toward self-love and pride. But even Augustine affirmed the superiority of the heavenly legitimacy to earthly empire as a necessary means of restraining evil and maintaining order in a fallen world.

The danger was subtle but profound. While Augustine did not glorify empire, his thought laid the foundation for later thinkers to sacralize it. Empire could now be seen as providential- a tool in God's purposes. The suffering, marginal church of the early centuries faded from view, replaced by a vision of Christian civilization blessed by God and defended by kings. This theological re-imagining extended to scripture itself.

Under imperial influence, the church began to reread the Bible through the lens of conquest and dominion. Old Testament narratives of Israel's wars and land possession were emphasized as divine precedent. The God who commanded

Joshua to take Canaan was fused with the Christ who told Peter to put away his sword. Instead of tension, there was continuity—Israel's conquest became a blueprint for Christian expansion.

The promised land was no longer a theological metaphor or a specific covenantal gift; it became a model for divine entitlement. Just as Israel had taken Canaan, so now Christian nations could claim lands in the name of God. Colonialism would later draw heavily on this theology, casting indigenous peoples as Canaanites and framing European expansion as a divinely sanctioned mission. The imperial reading of Scripture also distorted the church's understanding of election.

Rather than a calling to serve and bless the nations- as it was in Abraham's story- election came to mean divine favoritism. God was on "our" side. Nations could see themselves as the chosen people, with a manifest destiny to rule. This logic would later underpin both Christian nationalism in the United States and Christian Zionism in modern Israel, where divine election is equated with political supremacy and territorial entitlement.

Under the pressure of empire, grace was redefined. No longer the radical gift of the crucified God who lifts the lowly, grace became a tool of order- granted through the sacraments, administered by the state church, extended to those who obeyed authority. It was not the poor in

spirit who inherited the earth, but the obedient subjects of Christian kings. This imperial theology was not merely theoretical- it had pastoral consequences.

The church no longer stood with the outcast, the heretic, or the peacemaker. It stood with rulers, soldiers, and lawgivers. It no longer offered an alternative to the violent systems of the world- it legitimized them. It no longer called the powerful to repentance- it blessed them in the name of Christ. In this way, the image of God himself was altered.

The God revealed in Jesus- the one who washed feet, forgave enemies, and died without resistance- was eclipsed by the God of empire: enthroned, commanding, punishing, and always on the side of the strong. Theologian Karl Barth would later call this the greatest heresy of Christian history: the projection of human power onto God and the worship of that power as if it were divine.

To challenge Christian nationalism and Zionism, then, is not merely to critique politics. It is to expose a false theology- a theology forged in the courts of emperors and sanctified by centuries of conquest. It is to unmask the image of God who blesses flags, land grabs, and war, and to call the church back to the God who was crucified outside the city gates.

What began with Constantine led to the slow remaking of theology in the image of empire. The cross became a sword. The kingdom became a nation. And God became a Caesar.

From Empire to Christendom: The Spread of National Faith

As the imperial church matured, its reach extended far beyond the Roman Empire itself. What began as a localized faith in Judea had now, through its marriage to empire, become a dominant religion of Europe and the West. But the church did not merely spread through preaching and service- it spread through conquest, alliances, and political integration. The transition from empire to Christendom was not a retreat from power, but an expansion of it. It was the birth of a new world order in which faith and nation would be fused in a single sacred identity.

“Christendom” is more than a cultural label. It names an entire system in which Christianity and political power are indistinguishable. In this system, to be born into a territory ruled by Christian kings was to be a Christian. Baptism became an act of citizenship. Churches were built not just as houses of worship, but as symbols of national pride and political order. Christian identity was no longer a matter of personal faith- it was a function of geography, ethnicity, and law.

This did not happen all at once. The fall of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century opened the door for a new configuration of Christian power. As Rome declined, the church- particularly the bishop of Rome- rose to fill the vacuum. The papacy gained political as well as spiritual authority, claiming the right not only to define doctrine but to crown kings. This growing power culminated in the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 AD as “Emperor of the Romans”, establishing what would become the Holy Roman Empire.

This event symbolized a decisive shift: the Christian faith, once persecuted by Rome, now reigned from Rome. The cross was no longer subversive- it was imperial. Christendom had arrived.

Under Christendom, theological authority and national identity were fused. Church and state operated as two arms of a single order. The church baptized armies. Monarchs defended orthodoxy. Heretics were tried by both religious and civil courts. War could be declared in the name of Christ. Loyalty to God was measured in allegiance to crown and creed. This synthesis shaped the European world for centuries.

In England, the monarch became the head of the church. In Spain, Catholicism was used to justify the expulsion of Jews and Muslims. In France, royal absolutism was undergirded by divine right

theology. And throughout Europe, political legitimacy was intertwined with theological correctness. To challenge the king was to challenge God. To question the church was to threaten national unity. This arrangement provided security, order, and cultural continuity- but at a terrible cost.

Christendom led to the crusades, inquisitions, and religious wars that devastated Europe. It empowered state churches to persecute dissenters, silence prophets, and suppress minority communities. It sanctified violence and wrapped the flag in the robe of Christ. And perhaps most insidiously, it made the gospel into a tool of national cohesion rather than a message of radical grace.

In this world, the church no longer saw itself as an alternative to the powers of the world- it became one of those powers. The result was a theology of triumph, not of humility; of orthodoxy enforced by law, not of truth revealed in love. Yet Christendom also laid the theological foundation for what would become Christian nationalism.

As the Protestant Reformation broke the religious monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church, it also inadvertently deepened the bond between religion and the nation-state. With the rise of national churches- like the Church of England, the Lutheran state churches of Scandinavia, or the

Reformed churches of Geneva and the Netherlands- faith became increasingly localized and nationalized. Now, Christian identity was not just tied to territory, but to ethnicity and language.

Martin Luther, for example, translated the Bible into German- not just to make Scripture accessible, but to forge a common Christian-German identity. The Reformation, while liberating in many ways, also reinforced the idea that true Christianity belonged to one's own people. Theologians like Calvin and Zwingli worked closely with city governments to build “Christian societies,” further blurring the line between discipleship and citizenship. This nationalist impulse would grow stronger over time.

By the time of the Enlightenment and the emergence of modern nation-states, Christianity had been thoroughly woven into the fabric of European identity. While secularism began to challenge the church’s authority, the cultural memory of Christendom persisted. National symbols were imbued with biblical meaning. Founding myths were baptized with divine purpose. Nations saw themselves as chosen by God- modern Israel's with a providential mission.
This is the theological soil in which modern Christian nationalism grew.

The idea that a nation could be inherently Christian- that it could have a divine mandate, a

sacred history, and a God-ordained destiny- did not begin with the United States. It was inherited from Christendom. The United States simply adapted it to new circumstances, rebranding the old union of altar and throne as a new covenant between God and democracy.

Likewise, modern Zionism would later mirror these same assumptions. When Theodor Herzl and later Zionists framed their movement in biblical terms- linking the Jewish return to the land with divine promises- they were drawing from the tradition of Christendom that had long merged theology with nationhood. Though distinct in origin and history, both Christian nationalism and Zionism are children of the same theological inheritance: a vision of God that favors nations, defines faith by geography, and legitimizes power through divine blessing. To understand the present, we must reckon with the past.

Christendom is not just a historical period- it's a theological distortion that continues to haunt the church. It replaced the body of Christ with the body politic. It traded the margins of society for the center of power. It taught generations to see the gospel not as a summons to radical grace and enemy love, but as the foundation of national greatness.

If the church is to reclaim its true identity, it must name this legacy for what it is: not the

triumph of Christianity, but its co-optation. The gospel does not need a throne. The kingdom of God does not need a nation. And Jesus does not need to be defended by kings.

The American Experiment: Democracy, Destiny, and the New Israel

The American project was born in the shadow of Christendom, yet it imagined itself as a departure from it. The founding vision of the United States was not a theocratic monarchy, but a democratic republic- government by the people, not by kings and bishops. And yet, far from abandoning religious identity, America infused its national experiment with deep theological meaning. The language of covenant, chosenness, and divine mission- drawn from the biblical story- was repurposed to sanctify a new nation. In this sense, America did not reject Christendom- it reinvented it.

Early Puritan settlers saw themselves as a “new Israel”, called by God to inhabit a promised land. John Winthrop, in his famous 1630 sermon aboard the *Arbella*, envisioned the new colony as a “city on a hill”- a phrase taken from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount but applied to an entire political project. In Winthrop’s imagination, the new world was not merely a place of refuge; it was a stage for divine providence. If the colonists obeyed God, they

would flourish. If they failed, they would be judged, like ancient Israel.

The theological framework- of national covenant, divine blessing, and chosen destiny- took deep root in the American imagination. It transcended denominations and centuries, appearing in presidential speeches, public school curricula, and patriotic rituals. Even as the state maintained formal separation from the church, it continued to function as a sacred polity. America was not just a political idea; it was a theological one.

The myth of the United States as God's chosen nation became central to American identity.

The myth was powerful because it gave meaning to expansion, conquest, and national suffering. The westward movement across the continent- often violent and destructive- was framed by "Manifest Destiny," a divine mandate to spread liberty, civilization, and Christianity. Indigenous peoples were seen not as neighbors or fellow image-bearers, but as obstacles to God's will. The land itself was interpreted through the lens of biblical promise; a new Canaan, waiting to be claimed by a new Israel.

Even the language of the American Revolution was baptized in theological terms.

The struggle for independence was cast as a moral and spiritual battle- a righteous rebellion against tyranny. Ministers preached sermons

comparing King George III to Pharaoh and America’s founding fathers to Moses. Liberty itself became a sacred concept, merging biblical freedom with Enlightenment individualism. The result was a uniquely American civil religion, where God and country were nearly indistinguishable.

This merger of Christianity and democracy gave rise to a distinctly American form of Christian nationalism.

Unlike the monarchies of Europe, American Christian nationalism was not centered in a state church or crowned king. It was grassroots, populist, and moralistic. It thrived in revivals, political campaigns, and cultural institutions. It found expression in Fourth of July church services, “God Bless America” bumper stickers, and pledges of allegiance that included the phrase “under God.” What made this nationalism so potent was the fusion of biblical themes with American exceptionalism.

The nation was not merely a participant in global history- it was God’s chosen instrument for moral order. American wars were righteous. American laws were just. American values were Christian values. This was not arrogance, the narrative claimed- it was destiny.

The same nation that declared “all men are created equal” built its economy on slavery. The

same voices that preached liberty denied women the vote and indigenous people the right to exist. The same churches that proclaimed the Sermon on the Mount turned a blind eye to genocide, racial terror, and imperialism. The gospel was invoked not to liberate, but to legitimize power. Grace became privilege. Election became supremacy.

As the United States grew in global influence, this nationalist theology was exported through missions, military intervention, and foreign policy. The Cold War, for instance, was not just a political conflict- it was portrayed as a cosmic battle between Christian freedom and atheistic communism. The language of spiritual warfare bled into geopolitics. Presidents were expected not just to lead but to pray. The Bible was held aloft alongside the Constitution. The cross and the flag marched in step.

By the late twentieth century, this fusion became institutionalized in political movements like the Religious Right. Evangelical leaders declared that America was in a state of moral decline and needed to “return to God”. But the God whom they urged return to was often indistinguishable from American ideals: free markets, military strength, traditional family structures, and cultural dominance. The faith they defended was less about the crucified Christ and

more about restoring a golden era of national greatness.

This is the theological core of modern Christian nationalism, we must tell the truth about the American experiment. It was a bold political project, but it was never a divine covenant. It was shaped by ideals and contradictions, by justice and injustice. It must be judged, not worshipped. It must be examined through the lens of the gospel, not the other way around.

The church's calling is not to preserve a national myth but to proclaim a crucified Messiah.

The Roots of Modern Zionism: A Parallel Path to Power

While Christian nationalism was maturing in the American context- wedded to democracy, destiny, and divine favor- another nationalist theology was forming across the Atlantic. In the late 19th century, Zionism emerged not merely as a political response to anti-Semitism or Jewish exile, but as a deeply theological reimagining of Jewish identity, land, and history. Like Christian nationalism, Zionism would come to merge religious identity with national aspiration, sacred text with territorial sovereignty, and divine promise with political power.

Zionism was, in many ways, a modern project. It arose during an age of nationalism, empire, and Enlightenment rationalism.

Yet it drew upon ancient biblical themes- particularly the covenant with Abraham, the Exodus, and the return from Babylonian exile. These themes, long held in spiritual memory and liturgical hope, were reinterpreted as political imperatives.

The Jewish longing for Zion, sung in psalms and prayed in synagogues, was transformed into a territorial claim- a divine right to the land of Palestine.

Theodor Herzl, widely considered the father of modern political Zionism, was not particularly religious. He was a secular European Jew, deeply disturbed by the rising tide of anti-Semitism, especially as revealed in the Dreyfus Affair in France. For Herzl, Jewish survival required a national homeland- a safe place where Jews could live free from persecution. He believed the only viable solution was sovereignty, and that the Jewish people, like other national groups in Europe, deserved a state of their own.

But even in Herzl’s secular vision, the language of chosenness and biblical destiny loomed large.

Zionism quickly gathered support among other secular and religious Jews. For the religious, it was a fulfillment of prophecy- God returning his people

to the land. For secular Jews, it was the normalization of Jewish existence, ending centuries of diaspora and vulnerability. Both groups shared a common goal: Jewish national restoration. Whether cast in spiritual or political terms, Zionism became a movement of return. But that was often obscured in this return narrative was the reality of who already lived in the land.

Palestine was not an empty wilderness waiting for divine redemption. It was home to a diverse population- primarily Muslims and Christians- who had lived there for centuries. Yet the Zionist vision, especially in its more nationalist strands, treated these inhabitants as historical footnotes or temporary occupiers. The land, it was said, had been promised by God to the Jewish people. Its current residents were obstacles to redemption, not neighbors in God's image. This theology bore striking similarities to the American myth of Manifest Destiny.

Just as Americans viewed the continent as a divine gift awaiting conquest, Zionists began to see Palestine as a land of promise whose rightful owners had returned. The narratives were parallel: exile, journey, promise, conflict, and possession. Both movements drew legitimacy from sacred texts. Both reinterpreted ancient stories as modern mandates. And both used religion to justify the displacement of others.

Yet Zionism, like Christian nationalism, was not monolithic.
There were, and still are, many forms of Zionism- cultural, religious, socialist, and revisionist. Some early Zionists envisioned a pluralistic, democratic society in Palestine. Others called for peaceful coexistence with Arabs. Still others, especially the more fundamentalist religious Zionists, saw the reestablishment of Jewish rule over the biblical land as a non-negotiable divine command. Over time, this more aggressive strain gained increasing influence, particularly after the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 and the territorial expansions following the Six-Day War in 1967.

At its most theologically extreme, Zionism became a mirror of the Christian nationalist impulse; a belief in national election of divine favor, and sacred territory.

In this vision, Israel was not just a modern nation- it was the fulfillment of God’s promise, the sign of the end times, the restoration of biblical Israel. Its wars were holy, its borders were God-ordained, and its political policies were shielded from critique by the mantle of divine will. This form of Zionism had no room for Palestinian presence, rights, or dignity. It demanded loyalty to the land and conflated criticism of Israeli policy with rejection of God’s plan.

This theological nationalism has also deeply shaped Christian Zionism, especially in the United States.

Many American evangelicals came to see the modern state of Israel as a prophetic sign- the fulfillment of biblical promises and the precursor to Christ's return. In this theology, political Israel is not just a state; it is a divine instrument. Its victories are seen as blessings. Its struggles are spiritual battles. Its expansion is God’s unfolding will. This belief system has led to unquestioning support for Israeli policies, regardless of human rights concerns or international law. Zionism, in both its Jewish and Christian forms, has thus become a parallel theology of national power.

Both Christian nationalism and Zionism construct identities rooted in divine election, sacred land, and political sovereignty. Both use religious narrative to justify violence, occupation, and exclusion. Both claim a special role for justice that might challenge their nationalist myths. And both, tragically, obscure the radical message of the prophets and the crucified Christ, who stood not with empires but with the oppressed.

To critique Zionism in this theological sense is not to deny the horrors of anti-Semitism, the need for Jewish safety, or the legitimacy of Jewish culture and identity. It is to question whether divine love can be confined to one people, one

land, or one flag. It is to ask whether God’s promises are instruments of power or invitations to mercy. It is to remember that the God of Israel is the God of the stranger, the foreigner, and the enemy.

These two movements- Christian nationalism and political Zionism- have developed along parallel tracks, each forging a new identity that fuses faith with power, and divine election with national destiny. But they are not merely modern inventions; they are the fruit of centuries of imperial theology. Before we examine how these ideologies converge in the modern world, we must first trace a crucial chapter in their formation: the rise of Christian nationalism in Nazi Germany. It was there, under the banners of cross and swastika, that the dream of a new holy empire reemerged with terrifying clarity. In the next chapter, we will explore how the theological legacy of the Holy Roman Empire was revived by the Third Reich- and how the church was forced to choose between complicity and costly resistance.

Chapter Two
Blood and Altar- Christian Nationalism in Nazi Germany

The Holy Roman Empire: Christianity Crowned by Empire

To understand the theological roots of Nazi Germany's Christian nationalism, one must look far deeper than the 20th century. The vision of a sacred empire- an earthly dominion ruled under the sanction of God- finds its origin in the marriage of Christianity and imperial power under the Roman Empire, but it is in the formation of the Holy Roman Empire that this fusion is fully institutionalized. The crowning of Pope Leo III in 800 AD marked more than the coronation of a king; it represented the divine endorsement of political power, fusing the altar and the throne into a singular authority.

The so-called Holy Roman Empire- which Voltaire famously quipped was neither holy, Roman, nor an

empire- was built on the idea that the Christian church should undergird and legitimize the rule of emperors. These emperors, in turn, were tasked with defending the faith, expanding Christian civilization, and preserving order in the world. This theology of empire rested on the premise that Christ now ruled not through weakness and the cross, but through statecraft, conquest, and law.

This imperial Christianity was not merely a backdrop to history- it shaped the very imagination of Western Christendom. The Church blessed wars, crowned kings, and demonized dissenters. Heresy became treason, and theology became a tool of statecraft. The gospel of Jesus, who had said, "*My kingdom is not from this world"* (John 18:36), was reshaped into a theology of sacred rule. The crucified Lord was re-imagined as a cosmic emperor.

For German-speaking lands, this legacy endured deeply. When the Holy Roman Empire (the First Reich) was reconstituted under Otto I in 962, it was proclaimed as the legitimate successor of ancient Rome, with a specifically Christian character. The idea of Reich- a realm or empire- was baptized in holy language and saturated with theological meaning. German rulers were not just political leaders; they were stewards of Christendom itself. Their mission was as much theological as it was political.

The language of the empire echoed Old Testament visions of divine monarchy. Emperors were seen as Davids, charged with maintaining God’s law; their conquests were likened to Joshua’s holy wars. The line between Israel and the empire blurred, and in this fusion, the seed of Christian nationalism was planted.

Though the Reformation would fracture the ecclesial unity of the empire, it did not dismantle the underlying theology of Christian rule. In many cases, it deepened it- especially in Lutheran territories, where the doctrine of the “magisterial Reformation" affirmed the role of princes and secular rulers as protectors of the gospel. Thus, Protestant nationalism emerged not in opposition to empire, but often as its loyal heir.

This fusion of German identity with divine purpose would become foundational. It taught a nation to view itself not only as a people, but as a chosen people. Over time, the idea of the Reich evolved from political aspiration into spiritual destiny. And by the 19th and 20th centuries, as new crises emerged, it would not be the cross, but the crown and the sword that were remembered.

The Second Reich and the Protestant Nationalist Dream

The fall of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 left a theological and political vacuum in Central Europe.

The divine order that had once crowned emperors and sanctified war was gone- but not forgotten. In the 19th century, a new German empire emerged from the embers of the old: the Second Reich, proclaimed in 1871 after Prussia's victory over France. At its head stood Kaiser Wilhelm I, and behind its formation stood Otto von Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor. This new empire was not a mere political project; it was deeply religious, rooted in the dream of a Protestant Christian nation-state ordained by God.

The unification of Germany was accomplished through calculated military campaigns and political alliances, but it was framed in messianic language. Many German Protestants saw the birth of the Second Reich as an act of divine providence- a restoration of order after the chaos of the Napoleonic era and the revolutions of 1848. The Kaiser, much like Charlemagne centuries earlier, was hailed as a divinely appointed ruler, tasked with defending Christian civilization and guiding the German people into their national destiny.

The vision of national rebirth was saturated with Protestant theology, particularly in its Lutheran form. Martin Luther's doctrine of the "two kingdoms" had long emphasized the legitimacy of secular authority as a divine instrument, but in 19th-century Germany that teaching was

transformed into a doctrine of state sanctification. The German state was not merely a neutral vessel for governance- it was increasingly seen as the earthly instrument of God’s will. The Gospel, once preached from the margins by a crucified Lord, was now entwined with Prussian militarism and imperial ambition.

German nationalism, in this context, took on an unmistakably sacred character. The nation was portrayed as a chosen people, with a providential role in history. This was no minor cultural development; it was a full theological reshaping of identity. Preachers and theologians spoke of Germany as a 'volkisch' community- a people bound not only by language and blood, but by divine purpose. The state church served as the guardian of the national morality, and the Bible was enlisted in the service of imperial expansion. The missionary mandate of Christianity was quietly replaced by the civilizing mission of the German nation.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the German colonial project. As the Second Reich pursued overseas colonies in Africa and the Pacific, these ventures were accompanied by religious justification. The so-called “civilizing mission” was a sacred duty to bring light to the heathen, not unlike the colonial rhetoric of Britain and France. But for Germany, this mission was

deeply tied to national pride and a theological belief in its own destiny. Germany was not just bringing civilization; it was bringing the kingdom of God.

This merger of nationalism and Protestant identity would become a foundational myth for the German people- one that survived long after the Second Reich itself collapsed in the aftermath of World War I. The humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, the economic devastation of the 1920s, and the cultural upheaval that followed would not destroy the myth- they would deepen it. Germans would not forget that they had once been God's chosen people, blessed with order, discipline, and divine favor. And in the midst of crisis, they would yearn for the return of that sacred order.

This longing paved the way for the next chapter in the story: the rise of a man who promised to restore Germany's greatness and reforge the bond between blood and altar. He would not be a theologian, but he would invoke God. He would not preach the cross, but he would speak of mission, destiny, and purification. And once again, the church would be faced with a choice between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.

Weimar Germany: The Collapse of Order and the Crisis of Faith

The fall of the Second Reich in 1918 did not simply mark the end of an empire- it shattered a sacred worldview. For millions of Germans, the defeat in World War I was not just a national humiliation; it was a theological rupture. The Kaiser, once believed to rule by divine right, abdicated in disgrace. The German church, so closely tied to the imperial structure, found itself adrift. And the people, long told they were chosen by God for greatness, now faced poverty, chaos, and shame. Into this vacuum came the Weimar Republic, an experiment in liberal democracy that many Germans viewed not as a new beginning, but as a betrayal.

The Weimar era (1919-1933) was marked by profound instability. Politically, the Republic was fragile from the start- assaulted by both leftist revolutionaries and right-wing reactionaries. Economically, hyperinflation devastated the middle class in the early 1920s, wiping out savings and breeding resentment. Culturally, Berlin became a symbol of decadence, artistic experimentation, and moral ambiguity. To conservatives and Christians alike, this new society seemed not only alien but demonic- a reversal of the moral order that had once undergirded the empire.

In this cultural and political earthquake, Christianity itself was shaken. The German church,

which had long aligned itself with imperial power, struggled to find its place in a democratic and increasingly secular society. Many clergy lamented the collapse of Godliness. Sermons were filled with longing for national repentance and restoration. And amid the uncertainty, a dangerous idea began to take root: that God had not abandoned Germany, but was testing it, preparing it for purification and renewal.

The loss of the Kaiser created a theological void. In previous generations, divine authority had flowed from the altar to the throne and back again. Now, with no emperor to serve as God's anointed, many Germans looked for a new messianic figure- someone who could restore the glory of the Reich and reclaim the nation's sacred purpose. That search became a religious one, even when it clothed itself in political or cultural terms.

Theological voices during this time responded in varied ways. Some, like Karl Barth, were beginning to see the dangers of tying God's kingdom to an earthly order. Barth's dialectical theology emphasized the utter otherness of God and the impossibility of using theology to justify political power. He would later write that the crisis of Weimar Germany exposed a "crisis in theology" itself- a failure of the church to discern between Christ and Caesar. But Barth's view was not yet

dominant. Most pastors and theologians remained deeply nationalistic, unable or unwilling to separate faith from Fatherland.

This confusion between Christian hope and national restoration would have deadly consequences. The longing for stability, unity, and meaning made many Germans susceptible to a political theology that promised redemption through strength, purification, and obedience. The Volk, or people, became a sacred category. Blood and soil were offered as sacraments. And the line between church and state grew faint once again.

Weimar Germany did not give rise to Nazism by accident. It prepared the soil- economically, culturally, and theologically. The chaos of democracy and the trauma of defeat generated a yearning for salvation, but not the salvation of the cross. This would be a salvation of power, purity, and national resurrection.

And in the wings, Adolf Hitler was watching and learning to speak the language of redemption.

The Rise of Hitler: Christ recast for Volk and Fatherland?

When Hitler rose to power in 1933, he did not do so by overthrowing Christianity in Germany- he did so by co-opting it. Hitler understood that for his nationalist movement to take root, it had to sound familiar. It had to speak the language of the

people’s wounded pride and religious longing. His vision of a purified, resurrected Germany was not just political- it was deeply theological, and he repurposed Christian imagery and rhetoric with chilling precision.

The National Socialist movement offered a new gospel: the redemption of the German people through racial purity, national unity, and absolute obedience. The crucified Christ of the Gospels- the suffering servant of Isaiah- was replaced with a muscular, victorious Christ, a divine prototype of the Aryan warrior. This was no accident. Nazi theologians worked deliberately to transform Christianity from within, replacing its Jewish roots and prophetic critique with a nationalist myth of strength, blood, and destiny.

One of the most insidious examples of this was the German Christians (Deutsche Christen) movement- a coalition of Protestant clergy and laity who sought to align the church fully with Nazi ideology. They declared Hitler as God’s chosen leader, and began revising liturgies, hymns, and even Scripture to reflect Nazi values. The Old Testament was dismissed as “too Jewish”. Jesus was recast not as the Jewish Messiah of a crucified kingdom, but as a heroic figure of Aryan strength. The cross was emptied of its scandal and filled instead with the glory of conquest.

In this “Nazified Christianity”, the church became the altar of the state. Baptism was linked to racial purity. The pulpit was turned into a platform for patriotic fervor. German identity and Christian faith were fused in a grotesque parody of biblical truth. The Sermon on the Mount was overshadowed by calls for obedience, vengeance, and purification.

This was not a fringe movement. By 1933, the German Christians won a majority in church elections. Hitler himself was baptized, confirmed, and never formally left the church. And while he privately despises institutional Christianity, he knew its power. He invoked God in his speeches, spoke of the divine providence, and promised to restore Germany’s soul. His genius was in understanding that faith need not be destroyed to be rendered useless- it only needed to be redirected.

Theologians like Paul Althaus and Gerhard Kittel, both respected scholars, helped justify this new synthesis. Althaus argued that Hitler's rise was a “gift of God” and a sign of divine intervention. Kittel, a biblical scholar, offered theological defense of anti-Semitic policies. Their work shows how easily even sophisticated theology can be conscripted into the service of empire when the cross is emptied of its content and the gospel is rewritten in the image of nation.

Yet, even as this nationalist Christianity took hold, a resistance was forming. The Confessing Church, led by figures such as Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Niemoller, rejected the Nazi distortion of the gospel. They issued the Barmen Declaration in 1934, proclaiming that "Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in the Holy Scriptures, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death." They rejected the idea that the church could serve two masters- Christ and Hitler. For this stand, many were imprisoned. Some were executed.

In Hitler's Germany, the stakes of theological compromise became brutally clear. A church that surrenders its prophetic voice for political power becomes a servant of death. It offers no resistance to evil because it has baptized evil as good. The rise of Nazi Germany is a case study in what happens when nationalism dresses in religious robes, and when Christ is recast in the image of Caesar.

This chapter of history must never be forgotten. For in it we see not only the dangers of totalitarianism, but the fragility of the church when it abandons the crucified Christ for a throne of worldly influence.

The Dream of the Third Reich: Rebuilding the Holy Empire

Adolf Hitler did not merely want to rebuild Germany. He wanted to resurrect a divine empire. The Nazi regime cast itself not only as a political and racial movement but as the spiritual heir to the Holy Roman Empire- a sacred calling to restore what had been lost when the First Reich collapsed centuries earlier. Hitler's vision of the Third Reich was the culmination of a mythic history: the First Reich was the Holy Roman Empire (800-1806), the Second Reich under the Kaisers (1871-1918), and the Third would be its eternal, purified fulfillment- a new holy empire for a chosen people.

This was no mere political branding. The concept of the "Third Reich" was steeped in apocalyptic theology, nationalist mysticism, and a reinterpretation of divine destiny. In this vision, Germany was not just recovering from defeat- it was fulfilling a sacred role in history. The empire that Charlemagne began and the Kaiser's continued was to be completed by Hitler, the messianic restorer of order, power, and spiritual unity. Nazi propaganda spoke in the tones of liturgy and apocalypse, portraying Hitler as the one who would inaugurate a thousand-year reign of peace and righteousness- language drawn directly from Christian eschatology.

This fantasy of restoration found fertile ground in the collective German memory. For centuries, the Holy Roman Empire had been more than a political entity- it was believed to be the earthly reflection of God’s cosmic order. Its emperors were crowned by popes, its wars were blessed by bishops, and its very existence was a blend of sword and altar. The collapse of that world left a void that liberal democracy never filled. Hitler stepped into that void with the promise not just of national resurgence, but of a new, sacral order.

Hitler’s regime drew heavily on symbols, architecture, and rituals that mimicked both ancient Rome and medieval Christendom. The Nazi Party adopted the imperial eagle and used Roman salutes. Massive rallies were choreographed like religious festivals. Swastikas adorned not only uniforms and flags but altars, churches, and crosses. Even the Nazi dream of Lebensraum- the conquest of Eastern Europe for German settlement- echoed the imperial crusades of the medieval Church, cloaked in racial rather than religious justification. It was a crusade without the cross, a gospel of blood and soil.

This blending of the sacred and the political was not subtle- it was central. Nazi theologians and ideologues framed Hitler’s rule as the return of divine order after the chaos of Weimar liberalism and Marxist atheism. The Third Reich was to be

God’s kingdom on earth, not through repentance or love, but through purity, strength, and submission. The Church, instead of challenging this blasphemy, often echoed it. Many pastors spoke of the Fuhrer as God’s anointed. Churches flew swastikas alongside crosses. Prayers were offered for Hitler’s protection. And the message of the crucified Christ was drowned beneath the roar of nationalist liturgy.

Yet the truth is that the Third Reich was not the fulfillment of God’s kingdom- it was the mockery of it. It recast the kingdom of God into a kingdom of violence, a mirror-image of the Holy Roman Empire that retained its trappings while rejecting its core. What Hitler built was not a New Jerusalem but a new Babel- an empire built on domination, racial pride, and the extermination of the other.

And still, the dream of a holy empire has not died. It continues to echo in the rhetoric of those who conflate God with nation, who long for a return to imagined greatness, who seek to crown Caesar in Christ’s name. The lesson of the Third Reich is not just historical- it is theological. Whenever the Church trades the weakness of the cross for the power of empire, it participates not in the kingdom of God but in the idolatry of anti-Christ.

Barth and Moltmann: A Theology Forged in the Fire

The rise of Nazi Germany did more than redraw political borders or devastate nations- it shattered the theological assumptions of an entire generation. The collapse of the German church into nationalism, the co-opting of Christ for empire, and the failure of liberal Protestantism to resist evil gave rise to a new theological reckoning. In the wake of Hitler's Third Reich, theologians like Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann began to ask the questions the church had avoided for too long: Who is God in a world where the cross has been used to bless genocide? What is the gospel when Christ is drafted into the service of empire?

For Karl Barth, the turning point came early. In 1934, he helped draft the Barmen Declaration, a bold theological statement from the Confessing Church that rejected the Nazification of Christianity. Barmen declared that the church must listen to "Christ as he is attested to in Holy Scripture," and not to "other events, powers, figures, and truths, as though they were the revelation of God." In those words, Barth drew a line in the sand: the Church serves Christ alone, not the Fuhrer, not the Volk, and not the state.

Barth's theology of the Word of God arose in direct opposition to the idolatry of national

revelation. Where Nazi theology saw history as the unfolding of German destiny, Barth insisted that God's Word comes from beyond history, breaking into it as judgment and grace. He saw the cross not as a symbol of imperial triumph but as the place where God opposes all human power that claims divinity. In a world where theology had been domesticated and politicized, Barth's God was untamable, sovereign, and radically free. And it was precisely this freedom that meant God could not be claimed by any nation.

Jurgen Moltmann, a generation younger, was formed in the ruins of the Reich. As a German soldier captured by Allied forces and held in a POW camp, Moltmann came face to face with his nation's crimes- and his own complicity. He encountered the gospel not through nationalist propaganda, but through a copy of the New Testament and Psalms given to him in captivity. It was in that place of humiliation and despair that Moltmann began to see God not in the victorious, but in the crucified.

Moltmann's theology emerged not only from Auschwitz and Dachau, but from Hiroshima and the smoldering ruins of Europe. His landmark work, *The Crucified God*, offered a searing critique of both nationalist Christianity and triumphalist theologies. For Motmann, God's power is revealed not in domination but in suffering love. At the

cross, God identifies with the victims of history- not of the Caesars or Hitlers, but the oppressed, forsaken, and the murdered. This was not an abstract theological point. It was a radical reorientation: God does not sanction empire- God suffers beneath it.

Both Barth and Moltmann call the Church back to the scandal of the gospel. In a world where Christ had been reshaped into the image of empire, these theologians returned to the Word made flesh, the crucified Jew from Nazareth, as the only true revelation of God. They exposed how deeply embedded the church had become in the structures of power- and how desperately it needed a theology of resistance.

Their legacies are not merely historical; they are prophetic. In every generation where the church is tempted to crown Caesar or baptize nationalism, Barth and Moltmann remind us that God is not on the side of empire. God is on the cross.

Their theologies- emerging from the wreckage of a church seduced by power- speak powerfully into our own age. For once again, nationalist movements are invoking God's name. Once again, Christ is being enlisted to bless borders, armies, and thrones. And once again, the church must choose: Christ or Caesar. Cross or crown. Crucified love or triumphant power.

The theologies of Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann were forged in the crucible of empire's collapse and the church's complicity. They emerged as fierce rejections of any gospel that bows to national power or uses God's name to sanctify violence. And yet, the forces they opposed have not disappeared. The idolatry of empire did not die with the Third Reich- it was reborn in new forms, often clothed in the language of democracy, freedom, and divine destiny. In the next chapter, we will trace how these same theological distortions re-emerged in the postwar era, particularly in the United States, where a new covenant between Christianity and empire took shape- one that would once again merge faith with nationalism, and the cross with conquest.

Chapter Three

Christian Nationalism: America's Civil Religion

I. From Crown to Covenant: The British Bridge to American Christian Nationalism

In tracing the trajectory of Christian nationalism across empires, one might be tempted to bypass the British Empire as a mere colonial enterprise rather than an expression of imperial theology. Britain does not appear to have declared itself a "New Rome". It lacked the overt eschatological claims of Russia's "Third Rome" ideology, the messianic fervor of Nazi Germany's sacral Reich, or the manifest destiny rhetoric that has shaped American civil religion. And yet, the British Empire served as a critical bridge between the sacral empires of the past and the nationalist theologies of the modern world. While it may not have spoken the language of Constantine, it carried his logic- culturally refined, morally justified, and baptized in Anglican moderation.

The Church, The Crown, and Imperial Power

From the moment King Henry VIII severed ties with the papacy in the sixteenth century, the Church of England became an arm of the state. The monarch was declared the “Supreme Governor of the Church,” fusing religious authority with national sovereignty. Anglicanism became a state religion, not just in doctrine, but in identity. To be English was, by design, to be Protestant. This fusion of faith and national identity was the

bedrock of the British imperial imagination. Unlike the Catholic empires of Spain or France, which derived legitimacy from Rome, Britain's Protestant empire derived its legitimacy from itself- a national church sanctioned by the Crown, ordained by providence, and reinforced by Parliament.

As Britain expanded its reach through trade, conquest, and colonization, the church went with it. The "civilizing mission" of the Empire was not merely economic or political- it was theological. Missionaries from the Church Missionary Society, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and later the Evangelical revivals, carried the gospel to Africa, India, the Caribbean, and beyond. But what they carried was not only the message of Christ- it was the moral framework of British society, the cultural expectations of Victorian respectability, and a deep conviction that Western Christianity was the pinnacle of divine revelation.

The Theology of Superiority

While the British Empire did not often speak in apocalyptic or messianic terms, it nevertheless operated under a functional theology of superiority. God, it was believed, had raised up the British people to carry the light of civilization and the gospel to the darker corners of the world. The logic of empire was thus cloaked in benevolence:

Britain was not conquering, but uplifting; not dominating, but discipling.

This conviction produced a paradox. While rejecting the authority of Rome, the British state replicated the same imperial theology under a Protestant guise. The Church legitimized the state, and the state empowered the Church. Colonized peoples were taught that their liberation could only come through assimilation to Western Christianity and submission to British rule. Racial hierarchies, economic exploitation, slavery, and cultural erasure are baptized in the name of order, progress, and divine mission.

The civilizing theology would echo loudly in Britain's colonies in America. But before the American experiment in manifest destiny and civil religion, it was Britain that tested the idea that a nation could wield divine purpose as a justification for global control.

Dissenters and Departures: The Puritan Exodus

Of course, not all Christians in Britain accepted this arrangement. Many dissenting groups-Puritans, Separatists, and radical reformers-viewed the Church of England as corrupt, too hierarchical, and insufficiently reformed. Seeking to escape the compromises of Anglicanism and the coercive power of the state-church union, many

fled to the New World. Yet even in their flight, they carried with them the theological DNA of British Protestantism- covenantal identity, divine election, and a vision of society shaped by biblical law.

The Puritans did not reject the idea of a Christian nation- they sought to build one. In their minds, they were a new Israel in a new land, a chosen people called to establish a city on a hill. They traded the crown for a covenant, but the logic remained the same: God’s favor rests upon a specific people who live according to his law. What they rejected in form, they retained in function.

While the Puritans profoundly shaped the theological vision of New England, it is important to remember that not all English colonies were founded by Puritans. Virginia, for example, was established by Anglican settlers with more commercial and aristocratic ambitions. Yet, over time, the Puritan vision of a covenant nation, blessed by God for its obedience and moral order, came to exert a powerful influence beyond New England. Even colonies with diverse religious origins gradually absorbed this sense of exceptionalism and divine purpose, especially as revolutionary rhetoric fused disparate colonial identities into a shared mythos of chosenness.

Thus, while America would go on to develop its own mythology, its theological imagination was deeply shaped by British Protestantism. The seeds

of American Christian nationalism were planted in English soil and watered by Puritan zeal.

Ireland and the Wounds of Religious Nationalism

One need only look to the long and painful history of Ireland to see how deeply religious nationalism marked the British imperial project. In the north of Ireland, the division between protestant and Catholic was never purely theological- it was political, territorial, and cultural. The English Crown set out to impose Protestantism not merely as a doctrine but as a marker of loyalty to the Empire. Irish Catholic resistance became synonymous with rebellion against British rule. The violence of this religious nationalism, stretching nine centuries into modern times, exposed the dark underside of the supposedly civilizing empire.

Many Irish Catholics, fleeing the very same British imperialism and Protestant supremacy that had oppressed them at home, found that America offered no true refuge. Instead, they encountered a protestant-dominated society shaped by the same theological and cultural prejudices of the British Empire.

In effect, the religious nationalism they had resisted in Ireland followed them across the Atlantic, now clothed in American civil religion.

They encountered discrimination, exclusion, and suspicion- not only ethnically and economically, but spiritually- as America’s Protestant identity, forged in part by British theology, shaped public life.

Britain enacted a form of imperial Christianity, where faith was not only a matter of conscience but a tool of allegiance. The Church and the state marched together, even as they sowed division and violence in the name of national unity.

From Empire to Exceptionalism

By the time the American colonies gained independence, they were already steeped in a British theology of national identity. Protestant virtue and the divine purpose. But in the crucible of revolution, this legacy took on a new form. Britain may have ruled through the crown and the Church, but America would rule through the Constitution and the Bible. The divine right of kings was traded for the divine destiny of the republic. The "city on a hill" moved west.

In this way, the British empire served as a transitional form of Christian imperialism- less dramatic in its theological claims, but no less foundational. It supplied the language, structures, and theological habits that America would amplify into a full-blown messianic nationalism.

II. Puritan Origins and Manifest Destiny

The roots of American Christian nationalism run deep into the theological soil of the Puritan imagination. When the first English settlers crossed the Atlantic, they did not merely envision a place of refuge from persecution. They believed they were carrying out a divine mission. The New World was not just a land of opportunity- it was a land of covenant, a new Promised Land. In their own minds, they were a new Israel, chosen by God to establish a holy commonwealth.

The ideas of "New England" as a new Canaan profoundly shaped the American psyche. The Puritans drew heavily from Old Testament imagery. They believed they were enacting a second Exodus, leaving the tyranny of Egypt (England) to enter a land prepared for God's elect. John Winthrop, in his famous 1630 sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," declared that their colony would be a "city upon a hill," a phrase later engraved into the national mythology. The eyes of the world were upon them, and failure would not only bring political consequences- it would be a betrayal of divine calling.

This theological framing transformed land acquisition and colonization into sacred acts. Expansion was not mere survival or economics; it was the unfolding of divine destiny. Native peoples were not simply others- they were obstacles on the path of covenantal fulfillment. The violence of colonialism was justified in religious terms, as the Canaanites had once been driven out of the land "promised" to Israel. The conquest of the American frontier became a reenactment of Joshua's campaign.

Over time, this vision grew beyond the Puritan church and seeped into the American civic imagination. The language of chosenness and divine sanction made the leap from theology to nationalism. What began as a particular religious mission evolved into a collective national identity: America was a chosen nation, with a divine mandate to spread liberty, order, and civilization- by the sword if necessary.

The doctrine that came to define the expansionist vision was 'Manifest Destiny.' Coined in the 19th century, the phrase captured the belief that the United States had a God-ordained duty to expand its territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This wasn't merely patriotic zeal- it was theological entitlement. Destiny implied inevitability, but it also implied divine commissioning. America's conquest of land, peoples, and cultures was framed as part of a sacred narrative.

Yet this sacred narrative was a profound distortion. It co-opted biblical themes- election, covenant, mission- and repurposed them for nationalistic ends. It replaced the humility of grace with the pride of possession. The cross was eclipsed by the flag. The biblical call to be a blessing to the nations was transformed into a justification for dominating them.

Importantly, this distorted theology was not merely rhetorical. It bore real fruit in the structures of law and society. The doctrine of discovery, the legal framework by which European Christians claimed lands not inhabited by fellow Christians, became enshrined in Supreme Court precedent. Missions to indigenous tribes were often tools of assimilation and erasure. Christianity

became the cloak of conquest.

This legacy lives on. The fusion of faith and nationalism did not end with the frontier. It metastasized. It became a civil religion- a way of sacralizing the state, its military actions, and its cultural values. The mythos of a chosen nation, divinely guided and morally superior, remains deeply embedded in American religious and political identity. And while it wears different robes today, the spirit of Puritan Manifest Destiny continues to animate much of what is called Christian nationalism.

In truth, what the Puritans founded was not a "New Israel," but a new imperial religion- one that cloaked the gospel in the garments of conquest. The tragedy is not merely historical. It is theological, because in adopting the story of Israel without embracing the suffering, exile, and prophetic critique that accompany it, American Christianity forged a new golden calf: a god made in the image of nation and power.

III. American Exceptionalism and Divine Mission

From its earliest self-understanding, the American project has carried with it not only a sense of political independence but a deep, almost sacred narrative of divine calling. America was not merely a new nation- it was a new Israel, a chosen people tasked with a redemptive mission for the world. This mythos, which became known as "American exceptionalism," is more than patriotic pride. It is a theological claim wrapped in national identity, suggesting that the United States has a unique covenant with God. In time, this belief has

helped to shape and justify nearly every facet of American expansion, war, and cultural domination.

A Chosen Nation

The Puritans who arrived on American shores did not see themselves simply as religious refugees. They believed they were establishing a holy commonwealth, a "city on a hill," ordained by God to shine moral light into a dark world. Drawing directly from the language of ancient Israel, they imagined themselves as a new covenant people- a nation called by God, with a divine obligation to conquer and civilize the land. The language of Deuteronomy, of blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience, was appropriated not to describe the church, but the new American nation itself.

The theological transference from Israel to America was not merely metaphorical. It was foundational. Just as Israel had been given land by God and charged to drive out the Canaanites, so too were early Americans convinced that the land of the "New World" was divinely promised to them, and that its indigenous inhabitants were obstacles to be removed. This fusion of conquest and calling would become the template for how Americans understood both their past and their future.

Manifest Destiny and the March of Empire

By the 19th century, this sense of divine mission was no longer confined to religious rhetoric- it had become national policy. The doctrine of Manifest Destiny declared that the United States was destined by God- to expand across the North American continent. This expansionist theology blended eschatological ambition with political

strategy, equating national growth with spiritual fulfillment. American borders were not merely political lines; they were markers of divine will.

And with this belief came violence. From the Trail of Tears to the Mexican-American War, the idea that America was called to bring democracy, civilization, and Christianity to "lesser" peoples justified the destruction of cultures, the displacement of millions, and the baptism of imperial conquest. As theologian William R. Hutchison noted, American exceptionalism was never a neutral theology- it was a messianic nationalism, capable of baptizing genocide in the name of God.

Even as Enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality shaped the political framework of the United States, they were selectively applied. The "divine mission" of America did not require justice for all- it required progress, dominion, and victory. Faithfulness to this mission was judged not by the ethic of the cross, but by the expansion of American influence. In this sense, the gospel was not so much rejected as co-opted. It became the tool of statecraft rather than a challenge to it.

Exporting the Gospel of Power

American exceptionalism did not remain a domestic phenomenon. In the 20th century, it became a global creed. After World War II, the United States emerged not only as a superpower but as the perceived moral leader of the "free world." Its prosperity, military strength, and democratic values were seen as signs of divine blessing. Presidents invoked God in their inaugurations, and pastors preached sermons

equating national loyalty with Christian duty.

Nowhere was this more visible than in the Cold War era, where Christianity and capitalism were forged into a singular ideological weapon against communism. The battle between the United States and the Soviet Union was cast in spiritual terms: good vs. evil, light vs. darkness, God vs. atheism. American nationalism became indistinguishable from Christian righteousness, and to oppose U.S. policies was to oppose God's purposes.

This alignment of faith with military and economic dominance has had devastating effects. Christian identity was subsumed into American identity. Churches draped in flags, prayers offered for national triumph rather than a global reconciliation, and sermons celebrating war as divine justice became normative. The crucified Christ was overshadowed by the victorious soldier. Grace was displaced by glory. The Beatitudes were buried beneath the bombs.

A Theology of Dominion

At the heart of American exceptionalism is a theology of dominion. It is the belief that those whom God favors are meant to rule. This contrasts starkly with the way of Christ, who emptied himself, took the form of a servant, and called his followers to take up the cross, not the sword. Yet in American civil religion, dominion is not a failure of theology- it is theology.

This dominionist impulse continues in movements that seek to "reclaim America for Christ," to restore the nation to its supposed Christian roots, and to legislate morality through political power. But this vision forgets that Jesus

never sought to reclaim Rome. He did not command Caesar to bow, but called his followers to love their enemies. The New Testament church never lobbied for empire- it endured it with radical grace and prophetic courage.

When the church becomes a function of the state, it betrays its Lord. Karl Barth denounced the German church's alignment with the Nazi regime and called the church back to the Word of God. The American church must hear the same call today: to repent of its allegiance to national destiny and rediscover the gospel's revolutionary power.

The False Gospel of Nationhood

American exceptionalism is not just a historical phenomenon- it is a false gospel. It proclaims salvation through strength, righteousness through borders, and calling through conquest. It replaces the kingdom of God with the empire of man and dares to baptize violence in the name of the Prince of Peace.

We have seen how deeply embedded this theology is in the American story. It is not a distortion from the fringe- it is central to how many American Christians understand their place in the world. And yet, it is precisely this understanding that must be dismantled if the church is to bear faithful witness in our time.

We will next examine how evangelicalism- the very heart of American Christianity- was drawn into this civil religion, forming a union that has shaped both church and state in ways that are still unfolding.

IV. The Merger of Evangelicalism and Politics

Evangelicalism, once known for revivalism, personal piety, and social transformation, has in recent decades become synonymous with political power. This shift did not occur overnight. It was the result of a slow and deliberate merger- one that transformed a grassroots spiritual movement into a formidable political bloc. What was once a decentralized faith marked by conversion and biblical authority became an engine of electoral strategy, legislative influence, and nationalistic rhetoric.

This merger has not only reshaped American politics. It has deeply distorted the witness of the church, transforming the message of grace into a mechanism for cultural dominance and turning disciples of Jesus into foot soldiers of the state.

The Quiet Turn Toward Power

Evangelicalism's entanglement with politics can be traced back to the mid-20th century, when conservative Christian leaders began responding to the perceived moral decay of American society. The removal of school prayer in 1962, the cultural revolution of the 1960s, and the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision were seen not simply as political developments, but as existential threats to a Christian nation. As evangelical leaders assessed the cultural moment, they concluded that withdrawal was no longer an option. If America was to be saved, the church had to act- not only as a moral compass, but as a political force.

Billy Graham, while often transcending partisan lines, opened doors between evangelicalism and political leadership. He served as a spiritual

advisor to presidents across the spectrum, but it was under Richard Nixon that evangelical proximity to political power began to take on a new shape. The alliance would only deepen in the decades that followed.

The decisive shift came in the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of the so-called 'Religious Right'. Organizations like Jerry Falwell's *Moral Majorit*y and Pat Robertson's *Christian Coalition* harnessed the energy of the evangelical grassroots, redirecting it toward electoral outcomes. The goal was not merely to preserve moral values- it was to reclaim the nation, to legislate righteousness, and to restore America to its "Christian roots." What emerged was not a revival of Christianity, but the invention of an Americanized gospel.

Political Conversion as Spiritual Fidelity

What made the Religious Right successful was its ability to frame political allegiance as spiritual obedience. Voting Republican became an act of faithfulness. Supporting pro-military, pro-gun, and pro-capitalist policies were cast as biblical. Opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage- legitimate moral concerns in many Christian traditions- were isolated from the broader biblical witness on poverty, violence, and justice. The result was a truncated moral vision that justifies political alignment under the banner of faith.

This alignment was not subtle. Churches became campaign platforms. Pulpits were filled with political talking points. Voter guides were distributed as if they were inspired texts. The line between disciple and partisan blurred until it

nearly vanished.

Meanwhile, evangelical identity was increasingly defined not by one's view of the cross or the resurrection, but by one's view of taxes, immigration, and foreign policy. Those who challenged the merger of faith and politics were accused of compromising the truth or betraying the church. In this way, political orthodoxy began to eclipse theological orthodoxy.

The Cost of Influence

The political success of evangelicalism came at a steep theological cost. In gaining access to the corridors of power, the church increasingly lost sight of the margins. Jesus' preferential concern for the poor, the stranger, and the oppressed was replaced with a defense of status quo hierarchies and national interests. The crucified God of the Gospels gave way to the triumphant state.

Karl Barth, in the aftermath of a church that had capitulated to the Nazi power, warned of the consequences of such alignment. When Christians are no longer strangers and pilgrims in the world, they are no longer the church. Similarly, Jurgen Moltmann reminds us that the church must be against the world when the world demands allegiance over the kingdom of God. In wedding itself to a political party, evangelicalism did not simply lose influence- it lost its way.

The loss was evident in the church's shifting witness. The language of the Sermon on the Mount gave way to the language of law and order. The Great Commission was interpreted as a cultural crusade. Evangelism became enmeshed with American identity, and foreign missions were often

places with nationalist assumptions. To be a Christian was to be a patriot. And to be a faithful church was to be politically engaged, socially conservative, an American institution.

Evangelicalism as a National Identity

In recent decades, "evangelical" has become less a theological label and more a sociopolitical identity. Surveys regularly show that large numbers of self-identified evangelicals do not attend church, read Scripture, or adhere to traditional evangelical doctrines. What unites them is not shared belief in the gospel- it is shared belief in the political vision of America.

This identity is increasingly racialized and exclusionary. White evangelicalism, in particular, has become a stronghold of Christian nationalism- blending cultural memory, grievance, and nostalgia into a theology of national redemption. Efforts to diversify or deconstruct this narrative have been met with hostility, often framed as attacks on Christianity itself.

But the gospel is not threatened by such critiques. It is threatened by their absence. When the church no longer welcomes prophetic voices, when it no longer hears the cries of the oppressed, and when it confuses partisan loyalty for kingdom fidelity, it ceases to be the body of Christ and becomes merely a chaplain to empire.

A Call to Repentance

The merger of evangelicalism and politics has produced a powerful cultural force- but not a faithful church. Its fruits are seen in the defense of authoritarian leaders, the denial of injustice, and

the triumph of nationalism over neighbor love. The church must now reckon with this legacy and ask what it truly means to follow Jesus in a nation that calls itself Christian while crucifying the likeness again and again.

This is not a call to political withdrawal. It is a call to theological reformation. The church must return to its first love- to the gospel that declares God's kingdom has come, not through laws or borders or flags, but through the crucified and risen Christ.

We will next explore how this evangelical-political fusion culminated in the construction of a civil religion- a faith that cloaks the American story in sacred language, even as it empties the gospel of its radical, liberating power.

V. Civil Religion, Power, and Violence

The merger of evangelicalism and politics did more than mobilize voters or reshape campaigns- it gave birth to a new religious framework altogether: a distinctly American civil religion. This civil religion borrows language, symbols, and rituals from Christianity, but repurposes them to serve the nation rather than the kingdom of God. It is not confined to one denomination, nor is it overtly theological. Instead, it functions as a national liturgy- a set of shared stories and sacred symbols that reinforce the belief that America is a chosen nation with a divine mission.

What makes civil religion so potent is its ability to appear Christian while offering an entirely different gospel: one rooted in power, sanctified by violence, and directed toward the preservation of the nation-state rather than the transformation of

the world.

Sacred Symbols, Empty Meaning

American civil religion baptizes the symbols of the state in the language of faith. The flag is treated with reverence. The Constitution is spoken of in near-scriptural terms. National holidays become religious observances, with Independence Day and Memorial Day echoing the solemnity of Easter and Christmas.

Presidents quote Scripture in inaugural addresses. Congressional sessions open with prayer. Coins declare, "In God We Trust." But the god of civil religion is not the crucified God revealed in Jesus Christ. He is a distant, generic deity- always affirming, never confronting. He blesses the nation's ambitions and endorses its wars. He asks for no repentance and offers no transformation. His function is to sacralize the status quo. This is what theologian Robert Bellah identified in his seminal essay on American civil religion: a faith in the nation itself, framed in biblical language but severed from the biblical narrative. This faith is not heretical because it rejects Christianity- it is heretical because it imitates Christianity while preaching Caesar.

Violence in the Name of God

Civil religion is not merely ceremonial. It provides moral justification for violence. From the conquest of the native lands to the enslavement of Africans to the bombing of foreign nations, American civil religion has repeatedly offered divine sanction for brutality. It has framed wars as holy missions, economic systems as providential

order, and political leaders as God's appointed instruments.

This theology of violence is rarely questioned within civil religion. Those who challenge it are accused of being unpatriotic or even un-Christian. But the biblical witness tells a different story. Jesus did not wield the sword: he was pierced by it. He did not build empires; he was crucified by one. The early church grew not by aligning with Rome but by resisting its gods.

When the church takes up the tools of empire, it may gain influence, but it forfeits authority. It trades the scandal of the cross for the spectacle of military might. And in doing so, it ceases to bear witness to the Prince of Peace.

National Liturgy and Public Religion

Civil religion also operates through ritual. The singing of the national anthem in churches, the display of the flag beside the pulpit, and the routine invocation of God's blessing on the military all form part of a national liturgy- a public worship that centers not on Christ but on country.

These practices are rarely questioned in American churches. They are assumed to be natural, even necessary. But they shape hearts and minds. They teach believers to associate holiness with power, salvation with security, and divine favor with national strength. Over time, these rituals form an identity that is far more American than Christian.

The danger is not merely that civil religion is politically manipulative. The deeper threat is that it becomes spiritually formative. It shapes a faith that can no longer hear the Sermon on the Mount

because it has memorized the Pledge of Allegiance.

A Faith Without A Cross

What unites all forms of civil religion is the absence of the cross. The cross is too scandalous, too disruptive. It demands self-sacrifice rather than national pride. It proclaims forgiveness for enemies, not victory over them. It speaks of a kingdom that is coming, not one already achieved through force.

Civil religion cannot carry the cross because it thrives on domination. It cannot preach the Beatitudes because they threaten its hierarchy. It cannot point to the risen Christ because it has enthroned Caesar.

In this way, civil religion becomes a false gospel- a rival religion masquerading as Christianity. It is the religion of the high priests who blessed the Roman sword, not the Galilean who was nailed to the cross.

Barth, Moltmann, and the Radical Alternative

Karl Barth, having witnessed the horrors of civil religion in Nazi Germany, affirmed that "the church must always be reformed." It must always be measured not by its success in the world, but by its faithfulness to Christ. He rejected all efforts to make the gospel serve the interests of the state, insisting that the Word of God stands over every nation and ruler.

Jurgen Moltmann, writing from the ashes of post-war Europe, offered a vision of the crucified God- a God who suffers with the victims of empire rather

than vindicating its power. For Moltmann, true hope is not found in political triumph but in the resurrection of the crucified, the one who stands in judgment over every civil religion and every false messiah.

Both theologians call the church to a radical orientation- to renounce its fascination with power, to reject the lies of national destiny, and to rediscover the scandal of the cross.

The Way Forward

To confront civil religion is not to reject one's nation. It is to place one's ultimate loyalty where it belongs: in the kingdom of God. The church must rediscover its prophetic voice, speaking truth to power rather than becoming its echo. It must remember that it is not the soul of the nation but the body of Christ. And it must once again become a community of grace, peace, and resistance.

Chapter Four
Zionism: A Nation Reborn or a Theological Mutation

The Origins of Political Zionism

To understand the theological and political convergence of Christian nationalism, we must first grasp Zionism in its own terms. It is not a relic of ancient Judaism resurrected in the modern world; it is a modern political movement that emerged in a specific historical context- Europe in the late 19th century-amid a crisis of identity, survival, and longing.

Zionism was born not from the Torah or the Prophets, but from the ghettos of Europe, the salons of Vienna, and the persistent anti-Semitism that haunted even the most “enlightened” societies.

At the heart of this movement stood Theodor Herzl, a secular Jewish journalist and playwright born in Budapest in 1860 and raised in Vienna. Herzl was not a religious man- his Judaism was more cultural than spiritual- but he was deeply shaped by the rising tide of anti-Semitism that he witnessed across Europe.

The pivotal moment for him came during the Dreyfuss Affair in France (1894), in which a Jewish army officer, Alfred Dreyfuss, was accused and convicted of treason amid a surge of anti-Semitic fervor. Herzl, covering the trial as a journalist, was shaken. If anti-Semitism could thrive in the most “enlightened” and liberal nation of Europe, he concluded, then Jews would never be accepted as

equals in the Diaspora. The solution, in his view, was not assimilation but separation- nationhood.
In 1896, Herzl published *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), a manifesto calling for a Jewish nation-state. The goal was not the fulfillment of messianic prophecy or a spiritual return to the land of Scripture. Rather, it was a pragmatic, even desperate, attempt to secure safety and dignity for a people historically despised. “We are a people- one people,” Herzl wrote. And like all other peoples, they deserved a land of their own. That land, for Herzl, could be Palestine- but he was not wedded to it. In fact, in 1903, he proposed Uganda (then under British control) as a temporary Jewish homeland, a suggestion that split the early Zionist movement. The territorial ideal was secondary to the need for refuge.

Herzl’s vision gave birth to the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, which became the organizational foundation for political Zionism. This was a strikingly modern movement: it used the language of nationalism, the structures of European diplomacy, and the tools of the modern media and lobbying. It was secular and strategic. The Torah was not its constitution: rather, Herzl and his successors sought recognition from the great powers of Europe and later the British Empire. The Zionist movement worked to secure legal and diplomatic pathways

for colonizing Palestine, eventually leading to the Balfour Declaration in 1917- Britain’s promise to support “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."

Importantly, the Zionism of Herzl and his colleagues did not arise from a collective return to Jewish faith or Torah observance. It was, in many ways, a rejection of religious fatalism and Diaspora theology. Herzl and many of his followers believed that waiting for divine intervention for messianic fulfillment was both naive and dangerous. They saw religious Jews, who opposed taking the land by human force, as part of the problem. Zionism would no longer wait on God- it would take history into its own hands.

This foundational spirit- urgent, political, and secular- marked a profound departure from traditional Jewish thought. For nearly two thousand years, rabbinic Judaism had developed a theology of exile, rooted in divine punishment, patient hope, and messianic longing. The exile was not merely a political condition, but a spiritual one. Return would come only through divine mercy and repentance, not through human initiative. Zionism shattered that consensus. It redefined “return” as a national campaign and “salvation” as statehood.

This shift is critical to understanding the later convergence with Christian nationalism. Political Zionism did not arise from biblical fidelity but from

a modern nationalist impulse. Its goals were not covenantal restoration but territorial and political independence. While it would later be clothed in religious language- especially by Christian nationalists- the original movement was unmistakably a product of 19th-century European political ideologies. It took the longing of the prophets and recast it into the framework of the modern nation-state.

This ideological revolution led to a decisive rejection of Diaspora theology and transformed Jewish identity from a faith-centered people into a territorial nation- a shift that would have dramatic consequences for both Jews and Christians in the modern world.

The Rejection of Diaspora Theology

Political Zionism did not merely propose a new future for the Jewish people- it repudiated an old one. For nearly two millennia, Jewish identity had been forged in exile, dispersed across the empires of the world. This dispersion, known as *galut,* was not seen as a mere accident of history or a temporary misfortune. It was interpreted theologically as divine judgment, a call to repentance, and a test of covenant faithfulness apart from land or power. To be a Jew was to be a people-in-waiting, trusting in God’s promise of return not as a political project, but as a messianic hope.

This theology of exile formed the spiritual spine of rabbinic Judaism. In the wake of the Second Temple's destruction in 70 AD and the Bar Kokhba revolt's crushing defeat in 135 AD, Jewish thinkers and rabbis began to reinterpret their national identity. No longer tied to temple sacrifice or geographic sovereignty, the people of Israel became a portable faith community. Torah study, Sabbath-keeping, and ethical distinctiveness replaced political rule as signs of God's covenant. As Jeremiah had once instructed exiles in Babylon to *"seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile*" (Jeremiah 29.7), Jews adapted to life among the nations without surrendering their unique identity.

This Diasporic theology emphasized humility, patience, and hope. It discouraged rebellion against imperial powers and warned against any premature attempt to reclaim the land by force. Return to the land, in traditional Jewish eschatology, would not come by political maneuvering but through divine initiative. The Messiah, not a movement, would lead the way. Until then, exile was not a failure- it was faith in waiting.

Zionism shattered this theological framework. It dismissed exile as a sickness to be cured, not a providential season to be endured. The patience of the rabbis was replaced with the urgency of

politicians. The prayers of divine restoration were traded for diplomatic appeals to colonial powers. For Herzl and many of his successors, the ancient theology of exile was a form of submission, an unacceptable posture in a modern, nationalist age.

To be sure, not all Jews accepted this seismic shift. Many Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities vocally opposed Zionism, warning that it was a rebellion against God’s timeline. Groups like the Neturei Karta movement continue to reject the legitimacy of the modern State of Israel on theological grounds, insisting that no human-led restoration can precede the arrival of the true Messiah. They see Zionism as a false start, a usurpation of divine authority that invites judgment rather than blessing.

But these dissenting voices were increasingly marginalized as Zionism gained ground, especially after the horrors of the Holocaust. For many Jews, the need for a secure homeland became an existential imperative that trumped theological caution. The secular architects of Zionism successfully recast Jewish identity not as a faith in exile but as a nation-in-waiting. The Diaspora was no longer a theological calling- it was a problem to be solved. And the solution was sovereignty.

This rejection of Diaspora theology also had implications far beyond Jewish communities. It created a new framework- one that could be

eagerly adopted by Christian nationalists. If exile was a curse, and national power was the sign of divine favor, then Christianity, too, could justify its alignment with empire. The old biblical tensions between faithful presence in exile and political rule over land could now be reinterpreted through a nationalist lens. Israel was no longer the suffering servant among the nations- it was a model of redemptive conquest. And Christians, particularly those in Western imperial contexts, began to see their own nations in similar terms: chosen, powerful, and justified in their dominion.

In rejecting the theology of exile, political Zionism paved the way for a new theology of statehood- one that not only reshaped modern Judaism but also profoundly influenced the political imaginations of Christian empires. The results of this shift would reverberate in colonial strategies, foreign policy, and religious identity around the world.

Empire and Enmity: How the Church's Rise to Power Marked the Jews for Persecution

To understand the emergence of Christian Zionism in the modern world, one must first grasp the theological and political shift that occurred in the fourth century in the Roman Empire, when Christianity transformed from a persecuted minority into an instrument of imperial power. This

transformation not only altered the character of the Christian faith but also reshaped its relationship to the Jewish people in lasting and tragic ways.

Before this shift, Jews were generally tolerated within the Roman Empire. Though not free from occasional tension or conflict, Judaism was legally recognized as a *religio licita*- a protected religion with ancient roots. Jews were granted exemptions from Roman religious obligations, including the worship of the emperor, which allowed them to maintain their distinct identity within the broader imperial structure. Early Christians, by contrast, were seen as a subversive and potentially dangerous sect. Their refusal to worship the emperor or participate in civic religious life made them a target for periodic persecution by Roman authorities.

This balance of power was decisively upended in the fourth century, beginning with the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, when Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity. By the end of the century, Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman Empire. The once-persecuted Church became the custodian of state power, and with that power came the machinery of exclusion, discipline, and suppression. What followed was a tragic irony: the very community that had once suffered at the hands of imperial authority began

to participate in that authority- and turned its power against the Jewish people.

From this point on, the theological claim that the church had replaced Israel as the people of God- supercessionism- became a tool not just for ecclesial argument but for political marginalization and religious violence. Christian leaders and emperors enacted laws that restricted Jewish rights: forbidding the building of new synagogues, prohibiting Jewish-Christian intermarriage, and penalizing Jewish attempts to convert others to their faith. These laws were not the actions of a fringe group but the policies of a Christianized state wielding the cross alongside the sword.

The Church fathers reinforced this political shift with theological justifications. John Chrysostom, in particular, delivered a series of infamous homilies attacking Jews in the harshest terms, portraying them as demonic, cursed, and collectively guilty for the death of Christ. Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo also played their part- Augustine's "witness doctrine" argued that Jews should be preserved in a subjugated and humiliated state as living proof of Christian truth. Together, these writings helped to lay the ideological foundation for centuries of Christian anti-Judaism.

This imperial theology created a long arc of suffering for Jews in Europe. From the fourth

century onward, they were not merely a religious minority but a stigmatized, excluded, and often despised people, cast as enemies of God and society. Periods of tolerance were always fragile; pogroms, expulsions, forced conversions, and ghettoization became the recurring expressions of a theology that had been forged in the union of Church and empire.

It is essential to recognize that this pattern was not present in the early church. The New Testament bears witness to deep tension between Jewish leaders and the early Christian community, but it does not advocate a political or theological program of Jewish subjugation. It was only after Christianity became a tool of empire that this anti-Judaism was formalized, institutionalized, and weaponized. This practice became the norm and continues throughout the empire as it evolved and changed over the centuries in Europe.

This historical reality has profound implications for modern Christian Zionism. This fourth-century unholy alliance of the cross and crown did not merely shape Christian politics- it also twisted Christian theology into a tool of exclusion. This legacy remains, and we cannot understand Christian Zionism apart from it.

The Role of European Anti-Semitism and Christian Guilt

The rise of Zionism in the 19th century emerged from the crucible of centuries of European anti-Semitism. While Zionist thinkers like Herzl were preoccupied with nationalism, their movement gained urgency and moral traction largely because of the relentless persecution of Jews across Europe. Pogroms, ghettos, forced conversions, blood libels, expulsions, and cultural exclusions had defined Jewish existence in Christendom since the fourth century. The so-called “Jewish problem” became a permanent stain on the Christian conscience, though one that was rarely repented of until it became politically convenient.

Theodor Herzl himself was catalyzed by the Dreyfuss Affair in France- a clear sign that even assimilation and loyalty could not protect Jews in supposedly enlightened and secular societies. The promise of emancipation had failed. The Enlightenment's universalism proved to be a brittle cover for enduring hatred. It was in this context of disillusionment that Zionism found not only momentum but moral legitimacy. If the Christian world could not, or would not, provide safety, then the Jews must secure it for themselves.

But this moral argument had a double edge. Christian guilt, long repressed and rarely acknowledged, began to turn in Zionism’s favor, particularly after the Holocaust. The unspeakable

horror of Auschwitz exposed not only the failure of Europe to protect its Jewish populations but also the complicity of Christian institutions. From Luther's virulent anti-Semitism to the Vatican's silence, the church had blood on its hands. Even where Christians did not actively persecute Jews, their theology often provided the ideological foundation: supersessionism, the "Christ-killer" trope, and the portrayal of Jews as spiritually blind or cursed.

Zionism thus became more than a nationalist project- it became a redemptive proxy. By supporting the creation of a Jewish state, Christian nations could symbolically atone for centuries of violence. Political support for Israel was not simply about strategy; it was about salving a wounded conscience. This dynamic would only intensify after World War II, as Western powers, eager to prove their moral renewal, championed Israel's founding as a gesture of historical reconciliation.

But this penance was deeply flawed. It outsourced the cost of Europe's sins to the Palestinians. The establishment of Israel came not through confession and restitution to Jewish survivors within European survivors, but through the displacement of another people group in a distant land. Christian guilt did not lead to reform- it led to geopolitical realignment. The Western

world washed its hands, blessed the new state, and called it justice.

This dynamic also opened the door for Christian Zionism to flourish. In America, especially, support for Israel became a way to distance oneself from the anti-Semitism of old. Evangelicals could claim solidarity with the Jewish people, not out of shared suffering, but as a means of maintaining the moral high ground. It was a strange alliance as many of these Christians still held to the same supersessionist theology, believing Jews would one day convert or be judged. Yet, politically, they became Israel's most vocal cheerleaders, not out of repentance but eschatological convenience and historical guilt.

Moltmann was one of the few theologians who attempted to face this legacy honestly. As a German Christian who had lived through the Nazi era, he did not seek to atone by embracing Zionism blindly. Instead, he sought a theology of reconciliation rooted in the cross- not in nationalism. True repentance, he argued, would not result in a new empire, but in a shared future of justice, peace, and humility. The church's task was not to sanctify the state of Israel, but to confess its own crimes and become a community of grace in exile.

The moral crisis that gave rise to Zionism cannot be ignored. But neither can the consequences of

its solution. In the name of healing one trauma, another was inflicted. The sacred wound of the Holocaust became the rationale for an ongoing wound in Palestine. The Christian conscience was not cleansed- it was redirected.

Zionism itself became fractured between secular and religious visions. This internal tension continues to shape both Israeli policy and the global theological debate around the modern state.

Secular vs. Religious Zionism

Zionism, though often treated as a monolith in popular discourse, has always been a contested and multifaceted movement. Its origins lie not in religious prophecy but in the secular ideologies of 19th-century Europe- particularly nationalism, socialism, and Enlightenment liberalism. Yet over time, Zionism also became deeply entangled with religious aspirations and theological claims. This tension between secular Zionism and religious Zionism has not only shaped Israeli politics but also played a pivotal role in how Western Christians interpret and support the state of Israel.

Theodor Herzl did not appeal to Torah or divine promises. He appealed to the right of a people to self-determination. Early Zionist Congresses were filled with similarly secular thinkers- many of them influenced by socialism, rationalism, and European

political theory. The goal was national rebirth, not religious revival.

Yet even in the earliest days, the movement was not devoid of religious symbolism. Hebrew was revived as a modern language. Biblical imagery was used to galvanize support. And crucially, the land of Palestine, rather than any other available territory, was chosen because of its theological significance. While Uganda, Argentina, and parts of East Africa were floated as alternative Jewish homelands, the “Land of Israel” held a symbolic pull that secular logic could not fully explain.

As Zionism matured, the division between secular pragmatists and religious messianists became more pronounced. Secular Zionists- represented by early Labor Zionism and figures like David Ben Gurion- sought to build a democratic, socialist state that happened to be Jewish. Religion, to them, was cultural heritage at best and a private matter at most. They saw their task as constructing a modern nation, not ushering in the kingdom of God.

Religious Zionists, on the other hand, viewed the return to the land as a divine act. For them, the founding of the state was not merely political- it was eschatological. It marked the beginning of messianic redemption. This belief, rooted in certain streams of Orthodox Judaism (particularly the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and

his followers), gave theological meaning to statehood, land conquest, and even military power.

The 1967 Six-Day War, in which Israel captured East Jerusalem and the West Bank, became a watershed moment, reinforcing the belief that Israel's expansion was guided by God's hand.

This religious fervor, once on the margins, gradually moved to the center of Israeli politics. The rise of right-wing parties like Likud, the growth of the settler movement, and the increasing influence of the Chief Rabbinate all reflect the growing dominance of religious Zionism. Today, the theological claim to the land often overrides legal or ethical considerations. The Bible becomes a title deed, and a divine promise is invoked to justify occupation.

This evolution has profound implications for Christian Zionism. Evangelical support for Israel often blends the secular with the sacred, uncritically affirming both Israel's right to exist as a modern state and its supposed divine mandate to control specific territories. Yet this support often glosses over the internal contradictions within Zionism itself. It conflates Herzl's nationalism with Isaiah's prophecy. It baptizes modern militarism in ancient covenantal language.

Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann challenge this conflation. For Barth, any theological support for a

nation-state, whether Jewish or Christian, risks turning the gospel into ideology. The kingdom of God is not tied to territorial claims or ethnic lineage. Moltmann, writing after the holocaust and the founding of Israel, wrestled deeply with Jewish suffering and Christian guilt. But he resisted the temptation to equate modern Israel with biblical Israel. He argued that redemption cannot come through force or political sovereignty, but only through the suffering servant Christ.

The clash between secular and religious Zionism continues to shape the region- and the church. While one side speaks the language of democracy, the other invokes divine destiny. Yet both often unite in marginalizing Palestinians and sustaining occupation. The theological cost of this alliance is high: grace is replaced by law, promise by possession, and hope by hegemony.

No Longer My People: The Broken Covenant and the End to Sacred Geography'

The belief that the modern State of Israel represents the continuation of biblical Israel is the cornerstone of Christian Zionism and much of modern Jewish nationalism. It is a belief that holds enormous theological weight. If true, then political support for Israel becomes, in effect, an act of faithfulness to God's ongoing covenant. If false, then this belief is not only in error but profoundly

dangerous- distorting both Christian theology and global politics. This next section contends the latter: that modern Israel is not the continuation of biblical Israel, and that the covenant once given to the people of the land has found its fulfillment, transformation, and conclusion in Jesus Christ.

The sacred geography of the old covenant has come to an end.

Fulfillment and Finality in Christ

The New Testament presents Jesus Christ not as an addendum to the covenant, but as a fulfillment. What began with Abraham reaches its telos in the Messiah. The Apostle Paul is unequivocal: *"Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, and 'and to offsprings,' as of many; but it says 'and to your offspring,' that is to one person, who is Christ"* (Galatians 3.16). The entire framework of promise-land, descendants-blessing is recentered around one person: Jesus.

This is not replacement theology; it is fulfillment theology. What was once anticipated in shadows and types is now revealed in the person of the Son. Through him, the inheritance once defined by territory becomes redefined by kingdom. *"And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3.29). Ethnicity, geography, and ritual

no longer determine covenant inclusion- only faith in the one who fulfills all that the law and prophets promised.

To cling to the land after the fulfillment has arrived is to grasp the scaffolding once the building stands complete. It is a regression from gospel to law, from Spirit to flesh.

The Revoked Land: Exile as Theological Judgment

Many who support Zionist theology ignore the fact that the biblical land promises were always conditional. Deuteronomy repeatedly warns that disobedience will result in exile. "*You will not live long in the land...you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to*" (Deuteronomy 30.18, 28.63). The land was never a guarantee; it was a gift contingent upon faithfulness to covenant.

The exile to Babylon was not merely political; it was God's judgment. Hosea, in a moment of stunning divine rejection, declares: *"... for you are not my people, and I am not your God"* (Hosea 1.9). Later prophets extend this rejection beyond exile: *"the Lord has rejected all my warriors in the midst of me...he has brought down to the ground in dishonor the kingdom and its rulers"* (Lamentations 1.15, 2.2). These are not the words of a covenant that remains unbroken- they are the announcement of rupture.

The destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, foretold by Jesus himself (Matthew 24.2), marks a climactic judgment upon the old covenant order. With its fall, the entire sacrificial system, priesthood, and land-based theology collapsed. God was no longer dwelling in a house of stone, but in the body of his risen Son and among his people.

Jesus: The Reconstitution of Israel

Jesus did not affirm the old categories; he redefined them. The vineyard, once Israel, is now handed over: *"...the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom"* (Matthew 21.43). The true Israel is no longer a nation but a community shaped by faith in Christ. His twelve disciples do not merely represent followers- they symbolize a new Israel, a new people of God.

In John's Gospel, *"...the Word became flesh and lived among us"* (John 1.14), replacing the Temple itself as the locus of divine presence. Jesus is the new Moses, the new David, and the new temple- he is, in himself, the fulfillment and embodiment of all that Israel was called to be. The covenant is no longer in Torah or territory, but in the living Word who redefines belonging.

When Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that worship will no longer be on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem, but *"in spirit and truth"* (John 4.21-24),

he declares the end of sacred geography. God is no longer tied to a land; he is present wherever Christ is known.

Paul's Israel: Faith, Not Flesh

In Romans 9-11, Paul wrestles deeply with the question of Israel's place in salvation history. His conclusion is clear: *"For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel"* (Romans 9.6). The true children of Abraham are those who share Abraham's faith, not his bloodline. The ethnic nation has not been forgotten, but neither has it been preserved as the covenant nation. A remnant remains, Paul says, chosen by grace, not by lineage.

The olive tree metaphor in Romans 11 makes this stark: branches (ethnic Israelites) are broken off because of unbelief, and wild branches (Gentiles) are grafted in by faith. There is no path back to covenant status apart from belief in Jesus the Messiah. The idea that God has a separate plan for national Israel undermines Paul's entire argument: "*For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all*" (Romans 10.12).

Paul's eschatology does not envision the restoration of ethnic Israel to the land, but the inclusion of both Jew and Gentile in one new humanity under Christ.

The Zionist Error: Rebuilding What Christ Fulfilled

To treat the modern State of Israel as the ongoing object of God's covenant is to reverse the gospel. It is to build again what Christ has torn down. It exchanges fulfillment for shadow, grace for nationalism, and the crucified Messiah for the sword of empire.

Modern Zionism, though political in origin, is propped up by a theology that refuses to let the covenant move forward in Christ. It reads the Old Testament as a final word rather than a promissory note cashed in the incarnation. The land becomes an idol. The state becomes a sacred cow. And a gospel meant for all nations becomes captive to one.

The tragic irony is that many Christian Zionists defend a covenant that God has fulfilled and transcended. In doing so, they reject the very Christ who stands as its fulfillment. The cross was the end of tribal religion; it was the opening of a new covenant for all peoples. To return to sacred land is to turn away from the sacred body broken for the world.

The theological mutation we have traced in Zionism is not merely a misunderstanding of scripture- it is a reversion to the very religious nationalism that Jesus opposed. The gospel breaks down dividing walls, but Zionism rebuilds them in

stone and state. As we've already seen in both American and German Christian nationalism, the fusion of divine election with national identity leads not to faithfulness, but to idolatry. Whether draped in stars and stripes, iron crosses, or blue and white flags, the pattern is the same: God is conscripted to bless empire, and Christ is replaced by the nation. Zionism, though it cloaks itself in biblical language, participates in the same heresy- the nation as savior, the land as gospel.

But Zionism is not the final word in this global convergence of sacred nationalism. Its logic- of chosen people, holy land, and divine mandate- echoes far beyond the Middle East. In Russia, an ancient church and a modern authoritarian state have fused their ambitions into a theology of empire, drawing on centuries-old myths to justify present power. As we turn now to the myth of the Third Rome, we will see how Zionism, American exceptionalism, the Third Reich, and Russian Orthodoxy are not isolated phenomena- but interconnected expressions of a deeper heresy; the replacement of the kingdom of God with the kingdoms of men.

Chapter 5
The Third Rome: Russian Orthodoxy and the Politics of Sacred Empire

A New Rome Rises

In 1453, as the last walls of Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, a powerful idea crossed eastward into the heart of the Slavic world: Rome had fallen a second time, and now it was Moscow's divine duty to become the final bastion of Christian civilization. The collapse of the Byzantine Empire- seen by many Orthodox Christians as the second incarnation of Rome- left a theological and political vacuum. And into that vacuum stepped the rising Russian principality, ready to inherit not only the political mantle of empire but also the sacred vocation of Christendom.

The ideology that came to be known as the "Third Rome" was not born of mere ambition- it was a theological claim. It declared that the true Christian faith, preserved in Eastern Orthodoxy, had migrated from corrupted Western Europe to Constantinople, and with its fall, had found a final refuge in Moscow. The Russian czars would not merely rule politically; they would reign as divinely ordained stewards of the true church, defenders of the one holy faith against both heresy and infidels.

Philotheus of Pskov, a 16th-century Orthodox monk, articulated this vision clearly in a Letter to

Grand Prince Vasili III: “Two Romes have fallen. The third stands. And there will be no fourth.” It was a staggering theological elevation of Russia’s imperial destiny. No longer just a kingdom among others, Russia now stood in continuity with the Roman and Byzantine empires, as the final providential guardian of Christendom on earth.

This idea would take deep root in Russian identity, combining ecclesial authority with political absolutism. The church and the state were never truly separate in Russia. Unlike the West, where tensions between popes and emperors created a history of contestation, Russian Orthodoxy functioned as a pillar of imperial legitimacy. The czar was not merely head of state; he was God’s chosen representative, and his empire a sacred geography.

The “Third Rome” vision reframed nationalism as a holy calling. Russian identity was not simply ethnic or cultural- it was eschatological. The nation became a vessel of divine mission. To be Russian was to be chosen. And to defy the state was, increasingly, to defy God.

But the fusion of theology and nationalism did not arise in a vacuum. It must be understood as both a continuation of imperial Christianity and a distinct Eastern reaction to Western collapse and Latin corruption. The Great Schism of 1054 had already severed communion between Rome and

Constantinople, but in Russia, this schism would become an enduring narrative of purity against perversion, holiness against heresy. Where Western Christianity aligned itself with rationalism, capitalism, and modernity, Russian Orthodoxy clung to mysticism, communalism, and sacred tradition.

It is within this framework that Russian Christian nationalism must be understood- not merely as a political ideology but as a theological self-understanding. The myths that shaped the Russian Empire never disappeared. They were transmuted, suppressed, and reawakened. And in the ashes of Soviet atheism, these ancient ideas have risen again with terrifying relevance.

The Fall of the Third Rome

The myth of the Third Rome- Moscow as the final stronghold of Christian civilization- stood tall at the height of imperial Russia. Crowned by the double-headed eagle of Byzantium and consecrated by the Russian Orthodox Church, the Czars ruled not merely as political sovereigns, but as sacred monarchs, guardians of holy Russia and defenders of the true faith. But like the empires it claimed to succeed, the Third Rome would not last forever. The collapse of the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century marked not just a political revolution but a theological implosion. The bond

between altar and throne was shattered, and the sacred empire dissolved into the ashes of civil war, repression, and state-sponsored atheism.

In 1917, as World War I ravaged Europe and unrest shook the Russian interior, the centuries-old alliance between orthodoxy and autocracy reached its breaking point. The February revolution overthrew Czar Nicholas II, the "anointed of God", and ended the Romanov dynasty that had ruled Russia for over three hundred years. For the first time since the fall of Constantinople, there was no Christian emperor claiming divine right to rule. The Third Rome, at least in its imperial form, had fallen. What followed was not a new spiritual awakening, but a fierce repudiation of the old religious order.

The October Revolution later that year ushered in a radically different vision of the world: one rooted not in the kingdom of God, but in the dialectics of history. Marxist-Leninist ideology rejected all forms of religion as superstition and tools of oppression. The Russian Orthodox Church, once the spiritual core of national identity, now became a target of state repression. Monasteries were closed. Clergy were arrested, tortured, and executed. Churches were desecrated or converted into warehouses and museums of atheism. Holy Russia, which had claimed to be the last bastion of

true Christianity, was declared obsolete by its own children. The Soviet Union was born in its place.

For the Bolsheviks, religion was not only false- it was dangerous. Lenin himself had written that religion was "spiritual booze" used to dull the masses. Stalin would take this to its brutal conclusion, launching purges that decimated the church's leadership. By the 1930s, the Russian Orthodox Church had lost most of its bishops, seminaries were shut down, and liturgical life was largely extinguished, except in small, underground circles or in carefully monitored state-sanctioned forms.

The fall of the Third Rome was not merely an institutional failure- it was an apocalyptic rupture in Russia's sacred narrative. The grand claims of spiritual destiny were reduced to whispers among the faithful and martyrs in labor camps.

Yet even in its darkest hour, the myth of holy Russia refused to die. The Orthodox faith continued in exile among Diaspora communities. It was broken but not erased. A sacred vacuum remained, waiting to be filled.

During World War II, Stalin- ever the pragmatist- partially rehabilitated the Church to foster national unity. Select churches re-opened, and the patriarchate was restored, albeit under strict KGB control. This uneasy alliance marked not a resurrection of the Third Rome, but its ghostly

manipulation. Religion was no longer the soul of the empire: it was a tool of the state.

The dream of Moscow as the beacon of global orthodoxy was silenced beneath layers of bureaucratic surveillance and compromise. The Third Rome had become a haunted ruin.

In 1991, a new chapter in Russian history opened up with the fall of the Soviet Union. The church, now set free, had struggled to find its identity. No longer the body of saints and confessors, nor the imperial institution of the Czar, it found itself lost. But into this spiritual and political vacuum stepped an unlikely messiah: the post-Soviet state, eager to resurrect the glories of the past, not by restoring the Gospel, but by reclaiming the myth of a sacred empire. The fall of the Third Rome, it turned out, was not its end. It was its baptism into something far more ambiguous, reborn in the likeness of empire revived.

The ruins of the sacred kingdom were still warm. All that remained was to rebuild.

Putin and the Priesthood: The Resurrection of Holy Russia

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not merely mark the end of a geopolitical empire- it left a spiritual vacuum. For seventy years, Marxist-Leninist atheism had tried to extinguish the

church, silence its clergy, and erase the sacred narrative from the Russian imagination. However, when the Soviet Union experiment finally failed, what returned was neither liberal democracy nor secular pluralism. It was the resurrection of an older, deeper myth: Holy Russia, the land chosen by God to preserve the true Christian faith. And its messianic revival would find a steward not in a priest or patriarch, but in a former KGB officer: Vladimir Putin.

Putin's rise to power at the turn of the 21st century marked a turning point in Russia's post-Soviet identity crisis. He presented himself not only as a stabilizer but as a restorer of greatness, of order, and of spiritual heritage. It was not long before this restoration took on overtly religious dimensions. He cultivated a close alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church, particularly under Patriarch Krill, whose reign has been defined by fervent nationalism and loyalty to the state. Together, they re-forged the old symphony between altar and throne, in which church and state affirm one another's legitimacy under the banner of divine purpose.

This alliance was not accidental. Putin recognized what the czars before him had known: that religion, when fused with nationalism, could offer not only moral justification for power but a sacred aura that secular ideologies could never

provide. His regime appropriated orthodox symbols, language, and liturgy to frame its political mission as a spiritual crusade. Russian soldiers were blessed before invasions. Churches were built on military bases. Patriarch Krill anointed Putin's leadership as a "miracle of God." In this climate, dissent became not merely political heresy- it became theological betrayal.

The ideology of the "Third Rome" was reborn under a new imperial form. Moscow was again the center of Christendom- not in global consensus, but in defiant self-understanding.

The narrative shifted: the West had fallen to moral decadence, pluralism, and secularism. Western Christianity had compromised with liberalism and abandoned truth. In contrast, Russia stood firm, holding fast to traditional values- faith, family, nation- as a bulwark against the chaos of modernity.

This message found fertile ground in a Russia still reeling from humiliation, economic collapse, and loss of empire. Putin's gospel of Holy Russia offered identity, purpose, and historical vindication. It also offered absolution. By framing Russia's imperial destiny as a sacred mission, the sins of the past- colonialism, repression, violence- were not confessed but sanctified. The czars were no longer tyrants but protectors of faith. The Soviet war machine was recast as a defender of

moral order. And Putin himself became a kind of hybrid figure; a new Constantine, wielding both the sword and the icon.

What makes this development more than nationalist revivalism is its theological sophistication. Russian Orthodoxy brings to this arrangement a long tradition of *symphonia*- the Byzantine ideal that church and empire operate in harmonious cooperation under divine law. In the West, Christian nationalism often borrows from Protestant individualism or Roman Catholic hierarchy, but it tends to sit uneasily with the liberal democratic state. In Russia, by contrast, Christian nationalism is built into the very architecture of ecclesiology and political theology. The Orthodox Church does not stand beside the state but within its soul. It sees itself as guardian of the people, the land, and the divine story that binds them.

This model casts Putin not as a despot but as a *katechon*- a theological term from 2 Thessalonians referring to "*the one who restrains"* the coming of chaos or the antichrist. In Russian theological imagination, the empire serves as the restrainer of evil, and the ruler as God's instrument for preserving sacred order. Thus, the war in Ukraine, the persecution of dissenters, and the rejection of Western influence are not viewed as power grabs but as acts of spiritual defense. To oppose Putin, in

this framework, is to open the door to godlessness and disorder.

It is crucial to understand that this is not merely propaganda- it is theology. It is a vision of divine sovereignty that fuses eschatology with nationalism, history with liturgy. And in this vision, the resurrection of Holy Russia is not just about borders or politics. It is about the salvation of civilization itself.

Yet beneath the grandeur of this religious nationalism lies a deep irony. The empire that once martyred the church has become its messiah. The mechanisms of state violence, secrecy, and surveillance- once used to crush faith- now cloak themselves in cassocks and incense. What was once condemned as anti-Christ is now enthroned as Christ's defender.

This contradiction exposes the spiritual danger of nationalism masquerading as orthodoxy. And it opens the door to a deeper comparison; for just as Russia has revived the myth of sacred empire through Orthodoxy, America has done the same through Protestantism. The Great Schism of 1054, which once split the church between East and West, now lives on not just in theology but in geopolitics- in rival visions of Christian civilization, claiming to defend truth against apostasy.

The Csar, the Cross, and the Nation

To understand the depths of Russian Christian nationalism, one must reckon with its enduring mythos: the Czar as a Christ-like figure, the Russian people as a chosen nation, and the land itself as a sacred stage for divine history. These are not mere political fictions. They are theological convictions that have been cultivated over centuries and resurrected in modern form. The Russian soul, as imagined by its nationalist theologians, is inseparable from the Orthodox faith, the sacred soil of the motherland, and the divine calling of imperial destiny.

Historically, the Russian Czar was more than a monarch. He was an anointed one- a representative of divine authority on earth. Following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Moscow inherited not only political influence but a messianic role; the Third Rome, the final guardian of true Christianity before the end of the age. While the West wrestled with the Reformation, Enlightenment, and secularization, Russian Orthodoxy preserved a vision of unity- church and state bound together in sacred purpose.

This ecclesial-political imagination has shaped Russia’s national identity ever since. The crucifix and the double-headed eagle- the symbol of empire- were contradictions but companions. The suffering of Christ and the suffering of Russia were seen as mysteriously intertwined, and the Czar as

both protector of the church and martyr-in-waiting for the people's salvation. Even in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution, this myth was never fully extinguished. It lay dormant, waiting for a new age of holy revival.

Putin's regime has drawn heavily on this narrative. Though not formally crowned, he has become a functional Czar- a sovereign leader whose authority is cloaked in sacred imagery and liturgical validation. Portraits of Putin are often displayed alongside icons. His presence in Orthodox cathedrals is staged like a divine visitation. State ceremonies invoke the aesthetics of the Byzantine court. The message is clear: Russia is not merely a nation. It is a sacred empire with a messianic mission.

This theology of nationhood goes beyond symbolism. It shapes policies, cultural narratives, and public consciousness. Russia's laws against "blasphemy", the rehabilitation of imperial saints, the glorification of past Czars, and the integration of church doctrine into education all reflect a deliberate merging of faith and state. The cross is wielded not to invite repentance, but to sanctify the sword.

This is the paradox at the heart of Russian Christian nationalism: the gospel of Christ, who was crucified by empire, is now used to vindicate the empire itself. The suffering servant is recast as

the imperial ruler. The persecuted church becomes the enforcer of persecution. And the cross- once a symbol of radical, nonviolent love- becomes a national banner under which war is waged and enemies are crushed.

Here we must confront the tragic irony: in trying to save the soul of the nation, the church has bartered its own. When the ecclesial body pledges itself to the state, it no longer stands as a prophetic witness. It becomes a chaplain to Caesar. The Russian Orthodox Church, in its zeal to restore glory and order, has lost its capacity to speak truth to power. Its allegiance to the state has displaced its allegiance to Christ.

This dynamic reveals a core theological distortion. In the Orthodox tradition, there is a profound emphasis on mystery, unity, and cosmic redemption. Yet when these are fused with nationalism, they are twisted into a dangerous eschatology- a belief that the nation itself participates in divine redemption, that the state is not merely ordained by God but mediates salvation. In this framework, dissent is not just political opposition- it is spiritual treason.

Moreover, this vision of Russian sacred empire is explicitly set in contrast to the West. Western liberalism is portrayed as a fall from grace; a descent into relativism, sexual immorality, and godlessness. The Enlightenment, the Reformation,

and even democracy itself are cast as betrayals of divine order. In response, Russia assumes the role of defender of “traditional values,” as if preserving patriarchy, orthodoxy, and hierarchy is equivalent to preserving the gospel.

In this East-West schema, Russia becomes the new Jerusalem, and America the new Babylon. The spiritual war is no longer just internal- it's geopolitical. And the battleground is not only places like Ukraine, but the soul of the world.

This ideological warfare- between Holy Russia and the godless West- mirrors the ancient divide between Eastern and Western Christendom. The Schism of 1054 is no longer a footnote in church history. It is a live wire in global politics. And what’s at stake is not just power or territory- it is the very definition of Christianity itself.

Both Russian and American nationalisms claim to represent the true Christian civilization. Both baptize the nation in the name of Christ. Both invoke divine election, moral exceptionalism, and apocalyptic urgency. But each emerges from a different inheritance- Russia from Byzantine Caesaropapism, America from Reformed providentialism. And in their clash, we see not merely a political rivalry, but a theological civil war.

Enemies of Empire: The Church and the Dissenters

In the mythology of sacred empire, there is always an enemy. If the nation is holy, then resistance becomes heresy. In Russia, under the resurrected theology of the “Third Rome”, dissenters are not simply critics of the state- they are apostates, traitors to the spiritual identity of the people. This fusion of church and empire turns disagreement into blasphemy and turns the empire’s enemies into enemies of God.

Yet from the earliest days of the church, it was the dissenters, not the priests of power, who bore the marks of Christ. The first Christians were called atheists by Rome because they refused to worship Caesar. They were hunted, not for crime, but for fidelity to a kingdom not of this world. This is the memory that Christian nationalism must erase: that the church’s most authentic witness has always been its willingness to suffer, not its lust for power.

In contemporary Russia, the return of sacred empire has brought a fierce campaign against those who threaten the myth of national righteousness. Artists, journalists, peace activists, and clergy who oppose the war in Ukraine or the regime’s repression are denounced not only as political threats but as spiritual traitors. The Orthodox Church, which could have served as a

moral counterweight, instead amplifies the denunciations. It blesses weapons, silences dissenters, and equates loyalty to the state with loyalty to God.

One of the most symbolic examples of this is the case of Patriarch Krill's endorsement of the Ukraine invasion. From the pulpit, he declared the war a metaphysical struggle, portraying it as a defense of Russian Orthodoxy against Western secularism and moral decay. By framing the conflict in spiritual terms, the church gave the war its liturgy. Bombs fell under the shadow of the cross.

But amid the enforced silence, voices of protest persist. A small number of Orthodox priests have risked excommunication and imprisonment to condemn the war and the state's corruption of the gospel. Their resistance recalls the confessing church of Nazi Germany- a minority movement that dared to defy empire in the name of Christ. These dissenters remind us that not all who wear the cross serve the empire. Some carry it.

And outside of institutional religion, a broader community of protest has emerged. Russian human rights defenders, artists, and exiles have begun to tell a different story- one where the soul of Russia is not found in domination, but in repentance and renewal. These counter-narratives draw on the deep well of Russian spiritual

tradition, where suffering is not a tool of power but a pathway to truth. Figures like Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn, and Tolstoy- though sometimes co-opted by nationalist myth- also left behind a legacy of prophetic critique, a theology of conscience that refuses to bow to tyranny.

This resistance, however marginal, is crucial. It reveals that sacred empire is not the inevitable outcome of orthodoxy. It is a distortion- a heresy cloaked in vestments. True Christianity in Russia, as elsewhere, is found not in its alliance with the sword, but in its refusal to worship it,

Moreover, the global church has a role to play. When Russian Christian nationalism masquerades as the gospel, it is the responsibility of the global Christian community- especially in the West, to speak truth. Yet here lies a deep and dangerous irony: the same theological errors that infect Russian Orthodoxy are mirrored in the American church. When American Christians decry Putin's theocracy while celebrating their own nationalism, they reveal not a prophetic voice but a partisan one. Their critique is not theological; it is geopolitical.

If the church is to be a witness to Christ and not a chaplain to Caesar, it must reclaim its vocation as a community of resistance. It must remember that Jesus was executed by empire, not enthroned by it. It must honor the martyrs, not the kings.

In the Russian story, we see the costs of a church that trades its prophetic voice for national privilege. But we also see flickers of hope-dissenters who risk all to tell the truth. Their courage calls us back to a gospel that cannot be nationalized, a kingdom that cannot be nationalized, a kingdom that cannot be militarized, and a Christ who cannot be co-opted.

East and West: Rival Gospels of Power

The Christian nationalist visions of Russia and the United States, while emerging from distinct theological and historical trajectories, mirror each other in startling ways. Each claims divine favor. Each casts itself as a bulwark against civilizational collapse. Each sees itself as the defender of moral truth in a world of chaos. And each, in its own way, transforms the cross from a sign of self-giving into a banner of cultural conquest.

This parallel is not incidental. It is the aftershock of a thousand-year schism. The split between Eastern and Western Christendom in 1054 was not merely about papal authority or doctrinal nuance-it was a rupture of ecclesial imagination. The East retained a mystical, sacramental vision of the church and state in symphony. The West developed a juridical and institutional logic that

separated sacred and secular power, only to later sacralize the secular through national covenant and manifest destiny.

In Russia, the Byzantine model of Caesaropapism- where the emperor ruled with divine sanction and the church stood in liturgical union with the state- evolved into the ideology of Holy Russia. The Czar was not merely head of state; he was the earthly protector of Orthodoxy, almost a sacramental figure himself. This view left a deep imprint. Even in post-Soviet Russia, when state atheism collapsed, it was not pluralism that rose- it was empire rebaptized.

Meanwhile, in the American context, Christian nationalism emerged from a very different soil: the Protestant Reformation and the Puritan imagination. Here, God’s elect were not the subjects of empire but its founders. America was framed as a new Israel, a chosen land, a city on a hill. The Constitution was near-sacred, and the nation’s wars were often cast in redemptive terms. Unlike Russia’s ecclesial monarchism, America’s nationalism thrived on a democratic messianism- freedom, markets, and military might ordained by God.

Despite these differences, the core theological problem is the same: both East and West have nationalized the gospel. They have exchanged the crucified Messiah for a tribal deity. In both

systems, God is enlisted to bless state power, national borders, and military campaigns. The church becomes less a foretaste of a new creation and more a chaplain to the old order.

These rival nationalisms do not merely compete- they mirror and reinforce one another. American evangelicals often point to Russian Orthodoxy's authoritarianism as proof of false religion, while failing to see how their own civil religion functions in the same imperial mode. Russian theologians denounce Western decadence while ignoring their own complicity in state violence and censorship. Each views the other as apostate even as they both reflect the same fundamental heresy: the fusion of divine authority with national identity.

This rivalry is deeply geopolitical. Russia portrays itself as the last civilization against the moral anarchy of the West. The United States casts itself as the protector of liberty against Russian authoritarianism. But beneath the political theater lies a theological tragedy; both East and West are invoking Christ to legitimize empire. Both are playing out the ancient temptation Satan offered Jesus in the wilderness- the kingdoms of the world, if only he would bow down.

In this climate, Christianity becomes a cultural badge rather than a spiritual path. It is measured in slogans, symbols, and loyalty tests. In both Russia and America, one can wave a Bible while

crucifying the truth it contains. The Beatitudes are replaced by national anthems. The Sermon on the Mount is eclipsed by campaign speeches. And the suffering Christ, who called his followers to take up their cross, is eclipsed by strongmen who promise protection, prosperity, and power.

Yet the church cannot serve two masters. It cannot preach resurrection while defending crucifixion. It cannot proclaim a kingdom not of this world while sanctifying the empires of this one. The rival gospels of Russian and American nationalism must be named for what they are: counterfeits. They do not lead to the cross- they lead away from it.

Only by reclaiming the scandal of the gospel- its powerlessness, its vulnerability, its universality- can the church stand as a true alternative to the politics of sacred empire. Only then can it resist the pull of Caesar in all his forms, whether he wears a crown or waves a flag.

The Sacred and the Secular: Russian Orthodoxy in the Modern World

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked more than the end of a geopolitical era- it signaled the reawakening of Russia’s religious imagination. After seventy years of enforced atheism, the Russian Orthodox Church returned to public life with breathtaking speed. Cathedrals were rebuilt.

Monasteries reopened. Icons, once hidden, reappeared on walls and in state ceremonies. But this resurrection was not merely spiritual- it was political. The church’s return coincided with the reassertion of Russian power, and the two were quickly fused into a single story; Russia was back, and it was holy.

This post-Soviet revival of Orthodoxy was not simply a religious movement. It was a national rebranding. The chaos of the 1990s- economic collapse, political instability, and cultural fragmentation- left many Russians searching for identity. In Orthodoxy, they found more than tradition. They found continuity, unity, and meaning. But the church’s newfound role as moral anchor quickly evolved into something else; it became the ideological partner of the state.

Vladimir Putin, though often portrayed as a secular nationalist, has masterfully wielded religious symbolism. From televised baptisms to state-choreographed processions, his regime has cast itself as the defender of Russian Orthodoxy and traditional values. The church, in turn, has canonized the regime's narratives. Patriarch Kirill has declared Putin’s rule as a “miracle of God”, and church leaders routinely frame dissent as betrayal- not just of the nation, but of the faith.

The merger of sacred and secular realms has allowed the Russian state to moralize its

geopolitical ambitions. The war in Ukraine, for instance, is no longer a mere territorial conflict- it is a spiritual crusade. Russian propaganda frames it as a defense against a corrupt, godless West. The church blesses this interpretation, casting Russia as the last bastion of Christian civilization. In this narrative, tanks are icons and missiles are sacraments.

But this convergence is not without cost. The line between faith and state, always porous in Russian history, has now all but disappeared. The church has traded its independence for access, its prophecy for patronage. Its moral authority, once grounded in martyrdom and monastic witness, is now leveraged in support of war and political repression.

This alliance also poses a profound theological crisis. Orthodoxy's rich tradition of mysticism, contemplation, and sacramental life risks being co-opted by the machinery of empire. When liturgy becomes spectacle and icons become instruments of nationalism, the sacred is no longer a space of divine encounter- it is a tool of statecraft.

At the same time, modern Russia is not uniformly Orthodox or devout. Secularism, pluralism, and even atheism remain strong undercurrents, especially in urban centers. Many young Russians are disillusioned not only with the state but with a church that appears to echo its

propaganda. The spiritual hunger that emerged after the fall of the U.S.S.R. has not disappeared, but it is increasingly wary of institutions that serve power instead of truth.

In this context, the question is not simply whether the church can survive under authoritarian rule. The deeper question is whether it can rediscover its soul. Can Orthodoxy reclaim its prophetic voice, its theology of humility and incarnation, in a world that demands performance and power? Can it speak not just to the Kremlin, but to the poor, the imprisoned, the wounded?

The challenge facing Russian Orthodoxy is not unique. It echoes the struggles of churches across the world that have tied their fate to political regimes. In every case, the church must choose: will it be the chaplain of empire or the servant of Christ? Will it echo the triumphalism of Caesar or the brokenness of the crucified Messiah?

In today’s Russia, where the sacred and the secular have merged into a single imperial story, the stakes couldn't be higher. For the gospel to be heard again, the church must disentangle itself from the state’s embrace. It must rediscover the radical call of Jesus- not to rule nations, but to wash feet.

Sacred Empires and Shared Myths: Zionism and Russian Christian Nationalism

At first glance, Russian Christian nationalism and Zionism might seem to share little in common. One is Eastern Orthodox, the other rooted in Jewish nationalism. One arises from the ashes of the Soviet Empire, the other from the trauma of the Holocaust. But beneath these differences lies a profound and dangerous similarity: both construct sacred myths of national destiny, both intertwine religion with state violence, and both present themselves not merely as political projects, but as redemptive ones.

Russian Orthodoxy, in its modern form, tells a story of divine chosenness. Russia is not just a nation- it is a civilization, a spiritual entity charged with guarding true Christianity from the decadence of the West. This myth of exceptionalism mirrors the Zionist vision of Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, a people restored to their land by divine right. In both cases, history is read theologically, borders are sanctified, and violence is baptized.

In the Russian narrative, Orthodoxy and nationhood are indivisible. The church blesses wars as holy struggles, and dissenters are condemned as enemies not only of the state but of God. In the Zionist imagination, the modern state of Israel becomes the embodiment of God’s covenant, even when its policies contradict the ethics of the prophets. Criticism of the state is cast

as anti-Semitism; occupation is reframed as inheritance.

These narratives function as mirror images. Russian Orthodoxy looks east and south and sees itself besieged by secular liberalism and NATO expansion. Zionism looks at its Arab neighbors and sees an existential threat. Both invoke an ancient past to justify a militarized present. Both create a fortress theology in which God's people are always under siege, and violence is the only means of salvation.

This convergence becomes more unsettling when viewed through Christian Zionism, especially in the West. American evangelicals, who often cheer both Israel's military dominance and Russia's anti-liberal stance, reveal the deeper connection: a shared belief that God is on the side of strong nations, righteous violence, and sacred territory. In this theology, the kingdom of God is confused with the power of the state, and Jesus' call to love enemies is overwritten by geopolitical calculus.

What binds Zionism and Russian Christian nationalism is a common theological distortion: the sacralization of land and blood. The biblical witness, especially through the prophets and Christ himself, calls for justice, humility, and inclusion. But in both Russian and Zionist ideologies, these are subordinated to the logic of

conquest and exclusion. The cross is displaced by the sword; the kingdom is replaced by the fortress.

Moreover, both systems elevate martyrdom not as self-giving love but as national sacrifice. Russian soldiers dying in Ukraine are framed as Christ-like protectors of the homeland. Israeli military casualties are described in liturgical terms as sacrifices for the people. In both cases, the suffering servant is transformed into the patriotic warrior- a profound inversion of the gospel.

These parallels expose a deeper crisis: when nations wrap themselves in divine destiny, they become incapable of repentance. Every policy is justified, every atrocity excused. The sacred myth becomes a shield against critique. In this way, Russian Orthodoxy and Zionism, like American Christian nationalism, trade in the same currency- religion in service of empire.

Yet the gospel tells a different story. It calls people out of empire, not deeper into it. It offers not a holy land defended by walls, but a new creation where the meek inherit the earth. It summons the church to be a people of grace, not conquest; witnesses, not warriors.

The church must therefore reject all forms of sacred empire, whether dressed in Orthodox vestments, Zionist prophecy, or evangelical patriotism. In Christ, the dividing walls fall. The promise is not for one nation, but for all nations.

And the sign of that promise is not a flag- it is a cross.

PART II: Converging Powers, Shared Myths

Chapter Six
Evangelical Zionism: A Match Made in Empire

I. The Rise of Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism did not emerge from ancient theological roots but from the turbulent soil of modern empire. Its birth is not found in the apostolic witness or in the early church fathers but in the intersection of 19th-century revivalism, British imperial ambition, and a novel prophetic imagination. To understand the origins of this movement, one must look not to Jerusalem or Galilee, but to Victorian England and post-Civil War America- societies grappling with global expansion, industrialization, and theological dislocation.

Restoration and the Protestant Imagination

The theological impulse that would become Christian Zionism first appeared in 19th-century Britain, particularly through the teachings of John Nelson Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren. Darby was the architect of dispensationalism, a system that sliced biblical history into distinct eras, or "dispensations," each governed by

different divine covenants. In Darby's eschatology, Israel and the Church were utterly distinct. The Church was a spiritual entity, a kind of intermission in God's plan, while Israel remained God's primary covenant partner for earthly history. Thus, the restoration of the Jews to the land of Israel was not only a political hope- it was a theological necessity for the fulfillment of end-times prophecy.

Darby's system gained traction in a Britain that was both deeply Protestant and globally dominant. As the British Empire extended its rule across the world, a theology emerged to mirror this dominance. The notion of divine destiny and chosen peoples lent itself naturally to a framework where God's promises were tied to land, power, and national destiny. Protestant restorationism, at this point, was less about actual Jews and more about the symbolic role they played in affirming Protestant readings of Scripture and validating imperial worldview.

By the late 1800s, prominent figures like Lord Shaftesbury were advocating for the Jewish return to Palestine- not primarily out of solidarity with Jews, but because they believed it would hasten the second coming of Christ. This theological orientation was deeply apocalyptic, but it conveniently aligned with geopolitical goals. Britain, eager to secure a foothold in the Ottoman-

dominated Holy Land, found in Christian Zionism a powerful religious rationale for its political interests.

Transatlantic Transmission: America's Embrace

The movement did not remain in Britain. Across the Atlantic, American evangelicalism was undergoing its own transformation in the wake of the Civil War. As the frontier closed and the United States emerged as a global power, a similar synthesis of religious fervor and national ambition took hold. American Protestants, steeped in revivalist fervor and millenarian expectation, found in Darby's dispensationalism a new hermeneutic for the times.

Darby toured the United States in the mid-19th century, and though his personal influence was limited, the seeds he planted bore immense fruit. American evangelicals, particularly in the emerging Bible Conference movement, absorbed dispensationalism with zeal. By the early 20th century, figures like D.L. Moody, William Blackstone, and later, Lewis Sperry Chafer would popularize the idea that the return of the Jews to Palestine was a sign of the end times. Blackstone's 1891 "Memorial," signed by industrial titans and Christian leaders alike, urged President Benjamin Harrison to support the re-establishment of a

Jewish homeland- decades before Theodor Herzl's political Zionism would take shape.

Here, Christian Zionism began to crystallize: a theological conviction, birthed in dispensational eschatology, fused with an emerging American sense of providential mission in the world. The Jews' return to Palestine was no longer a curious biblical interpretation- it was a national interest, a spiritual imperative, and an eschatological countdown.

1948: Prophetic Fulfillment or Political Convenience?

The founding of the modern state of Israel marked a watershed moment. For Christian Zionists, it was not merely a geopolitical event- it was the fulfillment of prophecy. Never mind the long and complex history of Zionist political maneuvering, or the expulsion and suffering of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. To the dispensational mind, these were footnotes in a divine drama whose main characters were Jews, prophecy, and the promised land.

Theologians and preachers across the evangelical world heralded the establishment of Israel as a miracle. Overnight, centuries of theological interpretation shifted. The Church, once understood as the new Israel or the fulfillment of God's promises, was now

reinterpreted as a temporary placeholder. The modern nation-state of Israel became the true inheritor of biblical prophecy, the clock by which God's final acts would unfold.

Books, conferences, and eventually radio and television programs exploded with excitement. Israel was the centerpiece of God's redemptive plan, with Jerusalem the epicenter of the end times. The Church's mission was increasingly subordinated to supporting the Jewish state, both spiritually and politically. Christian Zionism became a fixture in the American landscape, no longer the product of fringe theology but the centerpiece of mainstream evangelicalism.

The Seeds of Unholy Alliance

This historical evolution laid the groundwork for the unholy alliance we see today: a merging of Christian faith with a particular geopolitical narrative, where fidelity to God is measured by fidelity to a nation-state. What began as an eschatological curiosity has become a cornerstone of American evangelical identity, informing foreign policy, shaping electoral politics, and redefining the gospel itself.

But before it became a political force, it was a theological movement- a movement that replaced the crucified Christ with a prophetic roadmap, and the kingdom of God with the nation of Israel. In

doing so, Christian Zionism prepared the church not for faithfulness, but for complicity with empire.

II. Dispensationalism and Eschatological Manipulation

If Christian Zionism is the political outgrowth, then dispensationalism is its theological DNA. This system of biblical interpretation, largely unknown before the 19th century, introduced a radical new architecture for reading scripture- one that severed the continuity between Old and New Testaments, Israel and the Church, justice and mercy. In its place emerged a rigid framework of “dispensations”- distinct eras in which God dealt with humanity differently, culminating in a final showdown where the state of Israel would play the starring role. It was, in essence, a theological reshuffling of history, with devastating consequences.

A New Hermeneutic of Division

Dispensationalism emerged from the teachings of John Nelson Darby and readily spread through prophecy conferences, Bible Institutes, and eventually mass-published study Bibles. At its core was a novel claim: that God had two distinct peoples- Israel and the Church- and two distinct plans for each. Unlike covenant theology, which saw continuity and fulfillment in Christ,

dispensationalism imposed a strict dualism. Israel was God's earthly people; the Church, God's heavenly people. The covenants with Israel were "everlasting," unfulfilled, and awaiting literal realization- particularly promises regarding land, nationhood, and kingdom rule.

This system gave Christian Zionism its theological legitimacy. By declaring that the promises to ancient Israel were not fulfilled in Christ, dispensationalism kept the modern state of Israel at the center of God's redemptive plan. The Church became a kind of interlude, spiritual, invisible, and temporary. Once the Church was "raptured" out of the world, God would resume his dealings with Israel through a period of tribulation, culminating in Christ's return to Jerusalem to establish a thousand-year reign from a literal throne.

The result was a theology in which the Church's mission became not witness, discipleship, or justice, but prophecy-watching. And more dangerously, a theology in which war in the Middle East was not a tragedy to be lamented, but a sign of divine activity to be celebrated.

The Politics of the End Times

Dispensationalism did not remain an abstract theology. It was inherently predictive, obsessed with identifying "signs of the times," and prone to

reading every global crisis as part of God's countdown. The Six-Day War of 1967, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, oil crises, peace treaties, and even economic collapses were all seen through this lens. Preachers and authors like Hal Lindsey (Late Great Planet Earth) and later Tim LaHaye (Left Behind) popularized the idea that world events were fulfilling biblical prophecy in real time.

But beneath the charts and timelines was a chilling implication: peace was not the goal. Any diplomatic effort that de-escalated conflict or promoted coexistence was viewed with suspicion, or even seen as obstructing God's plan. The more chaotic the region became, the more it confirmed the dispensational narrative.

Evangelical churches across America were taught to cheer for escalation, not because they desired suffering but because they believed it would hasten the return of Christ. In this upside-down eschatology, the death of civilians, the annexation of land, and the entrenchment of apartheid policies were all necessary components of God's unfolding plan. To oppose them was to oppose Scripture itself.

Weaponizing Prophecy

Dispensationalism also introduced an unprecedented level of simplicity to prophetic interpretation. Complex charts divided history into

segments; timelines predicted the rapture, the rise of the Antichrist, and the rebuilding of the Third Temple. It was theology by spreadsheet, and it turned serious exegesis into a game of prediction and control.

This weaponization of prophecy had a twofold effect. First, it replaced the ethical call of scripture with a fatalistic determinism. Justice, peacemaking, and reconciliation were seen as irrelevant- or worse, contrary- to God's timetable.

Second, it allowed evangelicals to claim biblical authority for specific political positions, particularly unconditional support for Israel. Any political decision that benefited the Israeli state was seen as part of prophecy; any call for restraint or critique was demonized as rebellion against God.

The Church became an enabler of injustice not by accident, but by design. When theology is built not around the cross but around a future war, discipleship inevitably gives way to domination.

The Church as Interruption, Not Fulfillment

One of the most profound theological distortions of dispensationalism is its treatment of the Church as a "parenthesis"- a temporary interruption in God's real plan with Israel. This idea directly contradicts the teaching of the New Testament, particularly Paul's argument in Ephesians and Romans that Jew and Gentile are now one body in

Christ, and that the promises of God have been fulfilled in him.

Dispensationalism fractures the unity of God’s people and denies the universal scope of Christ’s redemptive work. It reverts back to tribalism, elevating ethnic Israel while relegating the Church to a holding pattern. Rather than seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham, dispensationalism insists those promises are still pending, awaiting political realization through a nation-state.

This not only diminishes the work of Christ but also fuels a theological apartheid. It enshrines the idea that God's plan hinges on one ethnicity, one land, and one state- an idea completely foreign to the gospel of a crucified and risen Savior who tears down the dividing wall.

The Legacy of Manipulation

Eschatological manipulation- the use of end-times theology to influence behavior, voting patterns, and foreign policy- has left a deep scar on American Christianity. It has allowed pastors to make political endorsements under the guise of biblical authority, and it has turned millions of believers into foot soldiers for empire masquerading as prophecy.

Dispensationalism did not merely misread the Bible- it reshaped evangelical identity. It taught

generations to see the world not through the eyes of Christ but through the lens of impending judgment, where salvation was personal, but the geopolitical drama was already written. It robbed the Church of its prophetic voice and handed it over to imperial powers eager for religious cover.

This theology was enshrined and disseminated to the masses- not merely in pulpits and pamphlets, but in the most influential tool of American Protestantism: the Bible itself.

III. The Scofield Bible and the Remapping of Prophecy

The rise of Christian Zionism and its dispensational scaffolding might have remained a fringe theological curiosity were it not for one of the most influential religious publishing feats of the 20th century: the *Scofield Reference Bible*. First published in 1909, this annotated King James Bible became the de facto theological lens through which millions of American evangelicals would read Scripture. It did not merely provide commentary- it restructured the very way the Bible was understood, teaching believers not just what to think, but how to think.

C. I. Scofield: The Man Behind the Margins

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield was a former lawyer turned preacher with a checkered past and a

talent for systematization. Influenced by the teachings of John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, Scofield sought to make dispensational theology accessible to the average Bible reader. His innovation was both simple and revolutionary: embed the theology directly into the Bible itself.

The *Scofield Reference Bible* did just that. By placing dispensationalist commentary in footnotes, linking verses through a system of cross-references, and dividing history into seven dispensations, Scofield offered readers a readymade interpretive system. With chapter headings like "The Call of Abram (Beginning of the Hebrew Nation)" and footnotes explaining that Old Testament promises to Israel were yet to be fulfilled in the modern state, the average reader encountered not just Scripture, but Scriptures pre-interpreted through a highly specific eschatological framework.

It was a masterstroke of theological persuasion. For many evangelicals, especially in rural or independent churches without formal theological training, the Scofield Bible was their seminary, commentary, and systematic theology all in one.

Canonizing Dispensationalism

What the Scofield Bible accomplished was nothing short of canonizing dispensationalism within the American evangelical psyche. Because

its commentary was printed alongside the sacred text, readers often failed to distinguish between the Bible and Scofield's interpretation of it. The layout encouraged readers to treat the notes as clarifications rather than arguments- subtle but powerful.

Scofield's marginalia reinforced the central claims of dispensationalism:

- That God has two distinct people and plans: Israel and the Church.
- That the Church age is a parenthesis between God's dealings with Israel
- That the promise to Abraham regarding land and nationhood are unconditional, everlasting, and still pending.
- That the restoration of national Israel is central to God's future plans.

In doing so, Scofield rewrote the theological land scale. he took what had been a recent innovation and gave it the appearance of biblical antiquity. Readers came to believe that to disagree with dispensationalism was to disagree with the Bible itself.

This had profound implications for American views on Israel, prophecy, and politics. By embedding these theological assumptions within the daily reading habits of millions, Scofield's Bible

ensured that support for the modern state of Israel became not just an opinion- it became orthodoxy.

Prophecy Charts in the Pew

Scofield's influence went beyond the printed page. Churches began to teach Bible prophecy using elaborate wall charts, timelines, and maps based on dispensational scheme. Evangelists traveled the country with massive illustrated diagrams, detailing the rapture, the seven-year tribulation, the rise of the Antichrist, and the millennial reign of Christ. At the center of every timeline was Israel- not as a people called to faith, but as a nation-state destined to reappear and ignite the final chapter of history.

Chapter Seven
American-Israeli Political Theology

I. The Birth of a Sacred Alliance

The bond between the United States and the State of Israel is often portrayed as a strategic alliance, rooted in shared democratic values, common geopolitical interests, and mutual security concerns. But underneath the surface of diplomacy and defense lies something deeper and far more potent: a shared political theology. What has emerged over the past several decades is not merely a political partnership but a sacred alliance- one where national identity, divine election, and historical destiny intertwine to form a theological framework that sanctifies statecraft.

The fusion of religion and politics has been nurtured by both nations. In the United States, evangelical Christians increasingly view Israel not only as a valuable ally but as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and a non-negotiable component of God’s plan. In Israel, religious Zionism and political nationalism have merged to create a sense of divine entitlement to the land, often reinforced by support from American Christians who see modern Israel as the vessel of God’s ongoing covenant.

Thus, what we are witnessing is not just collaboration between two governments, but the

formation of a theological-political mythology that redefines justice, war, identity, and even salvation.

The Myth of the “Chosen Nations”

Central to this sacred alliance is the myth of chosenness. Both American and Israeli narratives have long portrayed their respective nations as chosen instruments of divine purpose.

As we have seen, in American history, this idea dates back to the Puritans, who envisioned their new world as a “city on a hill,” ordained by God to shine as a light to the nations. That imagery has persisted throughout U.S. political discourse- from Lincoln’s invocation of providence to Reagan’s revival of the shining city metaphor during the Cold War. America’s self-image as exceptional, divinely favored, and morally superior has been a theological constant.

Israel’s founding story, meanwhile, is steeped in biblical symbolism. The creation of the modern state in 1948 was framed not merely as political restoration, but as prophetic fulfillment- a return to the Promised Land. For many religious Jews, especially within the settler movement, the modern state is not just a nation among others- it is God’s covenantal possession, divinely mandated and irrevocable.

When these two narratives of chosenness meet, they do not challenge each other- they reinforce each other. America, the exceptional nation, supports Israel, the chosen nation. And in turn, Israel validates America’s spiritual self-image by serving as its prophetic partner. Together, they create a theological echo chamber in which critique is heresy and power is sanctified.

Shared Symbols, Shared Legitimacy

This alliance is not merely ideological- it is liturgical. American politicians regularly invoke biblical language when discussing Israel. The U.S. embassy's move to Jerusalem in 2018 was not just a diplomatic decision; it was celebrated with prayers, Scripture readings, and declarations that the act fulfilled God’s promises.

The presence of evangelical pastors- many of them vocal Christian Zionists- at the embassy dedication ceremony highlighted the theological nature of the event. Jerusalem was not just a city; it was a sacred symbol. And America’s recognition of Israel’s capital was framed not as a matter of international law, but of divine affirmation.

Similarly, Israeli leaders have increasingly embraced Christian support, not merely as political capital, but as theological validation. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has often addressed evangelical audiences as trusted allies

in the spiritual battle for the land. American Christians, in turn, are told that supporting Israel is supporting God himself.

In this ritualized exchange, theology becomes diplomacy. Scripture becomes statecraft. Political actions- whether military support, economic aid, or recognition of sovereignty- are transformed into acts of faith. The relationship becomes immune to critique because it is cast in religious terms.

A Theology of Power and Infallibility

The danger of this sacred alliance is that it creates a theology of power that resists accountability. If America is God's instrument, then to challenge either is to stand against God. In such a framework, justice is no longer defined by the prophetic demands of scripture- care for the poor, welcome of the stranger, love of enemies- but by alignment with national interests divinely interpreted.

This theology rewrites biblical categories. It transforms the Israel of God- the covenant community of faith called to reflect God's justice into a geopolitical state with unassailable moral authority. It conflates the Kingdom of God with the military power of the United States. It anoints empires instead of confronting them.

Karl Barth warned in the aftermath of Nazi Germany about the fusion of divine sanctification

with political power. He called the Church to resist any theology that baptized the state's agenda. Jurgen Moltmann, reflecting on Israel and the Holocaust, insisted that theology must never be used to justify nationalism- whether Jewish, German, or American. And yet, in the American-Israeli alliance, precisely this justification has emerged.

This is not the prophetic faith of the Hebrew Scriptures or the radical gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a nationalist theology that places divine authority behind political might and sanctifies the suffering it causes.

The Seeds of Idolatry

At its root, this alliance is not just problematic- it is idolatrous. It shifts the object of faith from the crucified Christ to the sword of Caesar. It demands allegiance to a flag rather than the cross. And it recasts the gospel as a strategy for global dominance rather than a message of sacrificial love.

The myth of the sacred alliance allows Christians to excuse injustice in the name of prophecy. It encourages them to bless war as divine judgment. And it blinds them to the suffering of those who do not fit the theological narrative, especially Palestinians, whose humanity is often erased in the process.

When theology becomes a justification for nationalism, it ceases to be Christian. It becomes a form of religious imperialism dressed in the language of covenant. This theological-political bond has shaped U.S. foreign policy, turning biblical interpretation into strategic doctrine and prophecy into foreign aid.

II. From Prophecy to Policy: Zionism in U.S. Foreign Affairs

What began as a fringe theological movement in 19th-century evangelical circles has, by the 21st century, become a central pillar of American foreign policy. Dispensationalist theology- once confined to revival tents, Bible conferences, and annotated footnotes- has shaped how the world's most powerful nation engages in the Middle East. The convergence of biblical prophecy and political realism has transformed American diplomacy into a vehicle for theological conviction, where religious narratives and apocalyptic expectations have real-world consequences.

This section explores how prophecy became policy- and how the American-Israeli alliance became not a geopolitical strategy but a religious imperative, driven in large part by Christian Zionist advocacy and the deep theological coding of American civil religion.

The Eschatological Blueprint

At the heart of this political theology lies a specific reading of the end times. Dispensationalism, as popularized by John Nelson Darby and systematized in the Scofield Reference Bible, imagines history as a sequence of divine dispensations, culminating in the return of Christ. According to this schema, the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948 was not merely a historical event- it was a prophetic milestone, signaling the beginning of the end.

In this theological narrative, the Jews must return to their ancient homeland, rebuild the temple, and reestablish their religious and national identity in order for the final prophetic events to unfold. This includes the rapture of the church, the rise of the Antichrist, the Great tribulation, and ultimately, the return of Christ to defeat evil and inaugurate the millennium.

This eschatological roadmap has become the lens through which millions of American Christians interpret current events. For many, supporting Israel is not primarily about democratic values or historical sympathy- it is about preparing the world for the Second Coming. Zionism becomes a prerequisite for the apocalypse.

This theological framework did not remain in the pews- it shaped the politics of those in power.

The Political Ascent of Christian Zionism

The rise of the Religious Right in the 1970s brought dispensationalist eschatology out of the theological margins and into the heart of American political life. Figures like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Tim LaHaye fused evangelical revivalism with political activism, mobilizing millions around social issues, family values- and unwavering support for Israel.

Ronald Reagan, heavily influenced by evangelical advisors, spoke openly about his belief that the end times might be near. He described the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" in prophetic terms and entertained the idea that nuclear war might play a role in biblical prophecy. Under his administration, American support for Israel deepened- not merely on the basis of shared strategic interest, but on shared theological assumptions.

Subsequent presidents, both republican and democrat, maintained the alliance, but it was under George W. Bush that Christian Zionism found a particularly sympathetic ear. Bush spoke of being on a divine mission, invoked biblical language frequently, and enjoyed strong evangelical backing. His foreign policy decisions- including the invasion of Iraq- were interpreted by

many evangelicals as part of a providential plan in the Middle East.

The influence of groups like Christians United for Israel (CUFI), led by John Hagee, and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which found common ground with Christian Zionists, ensured that political leaders across the aisle treated support for Israel as an unquestioned priority. Christian Zionist lobbying became a force to rival even traditional Jewish advocacy organizations.

Jerusalem and the Theology of Recognition

Perhaps no event better illustrates the merger of prophecy and policy than the decision by the Trump administration to move the United States embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018.

For decades, the international community had avoided recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, in part because of its contested status with Palestinians and its importance to multiple religions. But for Christian Zionists, the move represented far more than political solidarity- it was a fulfillment of Scripture, a bold confirmation that the U.S. stood with God's plan.

Yet this move also revealed the theological narrowness of Christian Zionist influence. No serious attention was paid to Palestinian Christians or to Muslim and Christian claims to the city. The

rich complexity of Jerusalem was flattened into a theological monolith, where only one story, one covenant, one people, and one prophecy were permitted to define reality.

In such a context, foreign policy becomes a stage for theological performance, where nuance is heresy and justice is subordinate to eschatology.

Collateral Damage: Justice and the Palestinian Question

The alignment of prophecy with policy has not been without its cost. Chief among them is the marginalization of the Palestinian people, particularly Palestinian Christians, whose voices are routinely silenced in evangelical discourse.

Because dispensationalist theology renders the modern State of Israel as the fulfillment of God's eternal promise, any critique of Israeli policy is seen as resistance to God's plan. The occupation of the West Bank, the blockade of Gaza, and the daily realities of checkpoints, land seizures, and military aggression are dismissed or justified as necessary for prophetic progress.

This has left little room for the prophetic critique found in Scripture itself- a critique leveled by the Hebrew prophets against injustice, violence, and idolatry within Israel. It has also alienated a generation of younger evangelicals who, though

raised on Christian Zionist doctrine, are increasingly disturbed by its moral blind spots and its failure to reckon with the gospel's call to justice and reconciliation.

American foreign policy, when shaped by theological absolutism, becomes not only rigid but ethically incoherent. It cannot see the humanity of all parties because it has already decided which side God is on.

From Apocalyptic Politics to Prophetic Witness

There is a deep irony in how American evangelicals have taken the language of biblical prophecy and turned it into a foreign policy blueprint. The apocalyptic visions of Scripture- filled with hope for justice, the end of empire, and the triumph of God's kingdom- have been twisted into a script for perpetual war and ethno-national supremacy.

This is not prophecy in the biblical sense. It is political fatalism disguised as faith. And it serves the interests of empire far more than it serves the purposes of God.

The church must recover a different prophetic imagination- one rooted not in predictive timelines, but in the witness of Jesus Christ. A vision where justice rolls down like waters, where swords are beaten into plowshares, and where

peace is not a footnote to the end times but the sign of the kingdom breaking into the world.

This sacred alliance has reshaped evangelical identity itself, creating a political-religious hybrid in which the gospel is indistinguishable from the policies of the state.

III. Evangelical Identity and the New Political Religion

The American evangelical movement, once characterized by its emphasis on personal salvation, biblical authority, and missionary zeal, has undergone a striking transformation over the last half-century. While those core tenets remain in name, the identity of the evangelical in America has increasingly been shaped not around creed or community, but around politics- and particularly around loyalty to the nation of Israel and the geopolitical project of American empire.

What has emerged is not simply a politicized evangelicalism but a redefinition of what it means to be Christian itself. Support for Israel, allegiance to American exceptionalism, and faith in prophetic timelines have become de facto markers of orthodoxy. In this shift, theology has not only been co-opted by politics- it has become politics, remade in the image of the state.

This is the rise of a new political religion- one in which the cross is eclipsed by the flag, and the gospel becomes a campaign platform.

A Faith Defined by Foreign Policy

For many evangelicals, the question “Do you support Israel?” has become a litmus test- not just of political opinion, but of faithfulness to God. Israel is no longer merely a nation among nations; it has become a symbol of biblical fidelity, prophetic destiny, and divine legitimacy.

This transformation is not accidental. It is the result of decades of teaching, media messaging, and theological conditioning that has enshrined Israel’s modern existence as the axis around which all biblical interpretation revolves.

Evangelical bookstores overflow with prophecy guides that map current events onto Scripture, always with Israel at the center. Television preachers declare that America will be blessed or cursed based on its treatment of Israel. Conferences, church sermons, and online ministries reinforce the idea that standing with Israel is equivalent to standing with God.

As a result, many evangelicals cannot imagine a Christianity that does not include political loyalty to the State of Israel. Theology becomes indistinguishable from nationalism. Faith becomes a foreign policy position.

Zionism as a Marker of Orthodoxy

The Zionist orthodoxy is enforced not through creeds but through fear and exclusion. To question Israel's actions is to risk being labeled anti-Semitic- or worse, unfaithful to God's Word. Pastors who raise concerns about justice for Palestinians face backlash or even removal. Christian institutions that host Palestinian speakers or criticize Israeli policy are inundated with protests, defunding campaigns, and accusations of heresy.

Within this climate, a troubling reversal has occurred: faithfulness is no longer measured by fidelity to Christ but by loyalty to a nation-state.

It is not merely that support for Israel is encouraged- it has become essential. Israel has been baptized into the gospel story, not as a participant in the global mission of reconciliation, but as the unchallenged protagonist of the eschatological drama. And so, to dissent is not only political treason- it is spiritual betrayal.

The Evangelical-Zionist Complex

This political religion is not organic. It has been cultivated through a complex network of theological institutions, media empires, and political alliances.

Major evangelical universities, seminaries, and para-church organizations receive funding and influence from pro-Israel political lobbies. Christian publishers profit from apocalyptic novels, end-times devotionals, and travel tours to the Holy Land that reinforce the narrative of Israel's divine centrality.

Mega-churches host "Israel Sunday" services complete with Israeli flags, IDF speakers, and sermons on Genesis 12.3- "*I will bless those who bless you.*" Evangelical leaders attend banquets with Israeli politicians and celebrate military operations as divine interventions. Organizations like Christians United for Israel (CUF) have created a permanent structure for aligning faith with Zionist politics, with millions of members mobilized not for evangelism or justice, but for political advocacy.

This apparatus forms what can be rightly called an Evangelical-Zionist Complex- a network that uses religious devotion to fuel political loyalty, and political loyalty to secure religious identity. It is a theology of power disguised as piety.

The Gospel in Chains

What is lost in this transformation is not simply theological nuance- it is the gospel itself.

The message of Jesus- radical, liberating, peacemaking, and rooted in the dignity of all

people- has been subordinated to the machinery of nationalism. The cross, which once stood as God's judgment on empire and violence, is now hung alongside the banner of military might and political conquest.

Evangelicals who once championed missions to the world now support policies that isolate and oppress others in the name of national security. Churches that once emphasized personal holiness now celebrate authoritarian leaders if they "stand with Israel". The ethics of Jesus- love your enemies, bless the peacemakers, welcome the stranger- are conveniently ignored in favor of a new gospel: America first, Israel forever.

This is not a marginal phenomenon. It is the dominant shape of the evangelical identity in much of the United States. It is a Christianity colonized by politics, where the Bible becomes a policy manual and Christ the mascot of empire.

A Call to Repentance

The crisis of evangelical identity is not merely theological- it is spiritual. It is a crisis of worship. For too long, the church has bowed to the golden calf of nationalism, offered incense to the imperial temple, and baptized violence in the name of prophecy.

To reclaim the gospel, evangelicals must repent- not just of wrong beliefs, but of misplaced

allegiance. The true people of God are not defined by geography, ethnicity, or statehood, but by faith in the crucified and risen Christ. The kingdom of God is not advanced through military alliances or embassy relocations, but through the Spirit's power and the witness of love and justice.

The path forward begins by disentangling faith from state, gospel from nationalism, and Christ from empire. Only then can the church speak with a prophetic voice rather than a political echo.

There are consequences of this theological-political merger for the church's witness in the world, and how it has undermined the credibility of the gospel both at home and abroad.

IV. The Church's Witness in Crisis

The convergence of Christian Zionism and American nationalism has done more than distort doctrine- it has disfigured the public witness of the Church. By aligning itself so closely with a political ideology, a nation-state, and an eschatological agenda rooted in dominance rather than liberation, the Church has forfeited its credibility as a prophetic, peacemaking presence in the world. Its voice, once raised in defense of the oppressed, is now more often raised in defense of power. And its gospel, once a scandal to empire, has become a chaplaincy to it.

The crisis is not limited to a theological debate within seminaries. It is an existential rupture in how the Church is seen, heard, and received in the world- and especially among those who most desperately need to hear the good news of liberation, justice, and peace.

Losing the Prophetic Voice

At the heart of the Church's mission is its prophetic vocation: to speak truth to power, to embody the values of the kingdom of God, and as a challenge to all forms of idolatry and injustice. This prophetic voice is always uncomfortable, often unpopular, and rarely aligned with political convenience.

But when the Church adopts the ideological armor of nationalism- whether American or Israeli- it loses the very distinctiveness that enables its prophetic witness. When the pulpit echoes the press briefings of political leaders, and sermons sound indistinguishable from campaign speeches, the Church is no longer prophetic- it is co-opted.

Evangelical Christianity in America has, in large measure, traded its prophetic role for political relevance. In defending Israeli state policy as sacred and American military intervention as a moral necessity, the Church muted its call to peacemaking. Instead of lamenting violence, it

rationalizes it. Instead of calling for repentance, it demands loyalty. Instead of standing with the marginalized, it aligns with the powerful.

This is not the witness of the crucified Christ- it is the witness of Christendom resurrected in nationalist clothing.

The Collapse of Moral Credibility

When the Church becomes indistinguishable from political ideology, it also loses its moral authority. The credibility of the Church's ethical voice depends not on power or popularity, but on its integrity- its willingness to speak truth even when inconvenient, to act justly even when costly.

But when support for Israel is treated as a moral absolute, regardless of human rights violations, occupation, or the suffering of innocents, the Church appears not as a moral leader but as a partisan actor. When compassion for Palestinians is framed as betrayal, and justice is selectively applied, the church's witness is fractured and its ethic compromised.

The loss of moral clarity is evident in the silence- or worse, complicity, of many evangelical leaders in the face of injustice. Palestinian Christians, who share the same faith as their Western brothers and sisters, are often ignored, dismissed, or accused of false theology for simply asking to be seen and heard. Meanwhile, the cries of the

oppressed are drowned out by applause for military action and political declarations.

What emerges is a Christianity that appears to bless the strong and abandon the weak- a gospel that no longer sounds like good news.

Witness Before the Watching World

The global Church watches this alliance with unease. Christians from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East see a Western faith that has wed itself to nationalism and militarism. The evangelical support for Israel, framed as the fulfillment of prophecy, is interpreted by many outside the U.S. as an endorsement of occupation and injustice. It reinforces the image of Christianity as the religion of empire- used to justify colonization, domination, and exclusion.

For non-Christians, particularly Muslims and Jews outside the Zionist framework, the Church's uncritical alliance with the State of Israel often confirms their suspicion that Christianity is inherently aligned with Western imperialism. It becomes more difficult to share the gospel when the gospel is seen as a political weapon.

This is not a matter of theological nuance- it is a missional crisis. The credibility of Christian witness is undermined not by persecution, but by hypocrisy. When the church defends what Jesus condemns and applauds what he mourns, it

cannot expect to be taken seriously as a bearer of God's kingdom.

A Cross-Shaped Witness

The only way out of this crisis is through a radical re-centering of the Church's identity on the cross of Christ.

The Church's witness is not to the power of the sword or the promise of land. It is to the Lamb who was slain, the one who refused violence and bore the sin of the world in his own body. The gospel is not about geopolitical entitlement- it is about reconciliation, enemy love, and the hope of a new creation.

A cross-shaped witness stands in solidarity with the suffering, even when politically inconvenient. It tells the truth, even when unpopular. It affirms the dignity of every human being, not just those who fit a prophetic narrative. It listens to Palestinian Christians, Jewish peace activists, and the global poor. It refuses to baptize nationalism or enshrine ethnic superiority in the name of divine election.

This kind of witness is costly. It will draw fire from the left and the right, from secular critics and partisan believers. But it is the only witness that can restore the church's moral clarity and prophetic edge. It is the only witness that can proclaim the gospel not as ideology, but as liberation.

Toward a Church for All Nations

In the Book of Revelation, the vision is not of one nation lifted above the rest, but of a multitude *"from every nation, from all tribes, and peoples, and languages"* gathered before the throne of God. The gospel tears down walls- it does not build them. It invites all into a new humanity, not through territorial conquest, but through the reconciling blood of Christ.

The Church's task is not to pick geopolitical favorites, but to embody this new humanity. Not to endorse nationalist theologies, but to expose them. Not to become an arm of foreign policy, but to be an ambassador of the kingdom that is not of this world.

Breaking the sacred alliance and reclaiming the Church's prophetic vocation is not only possible, but urgently necessary- for the sake of the gospel, the people of the land, and the integrity of Christ's body in the world.

V. Breaking the Alliance: Toward a Prophetic and Peaceful Christianity

The sacred alliance between American evangelicals and the State of Israel- fueled by apocalyptic theology, nationalism, and political utility- has not only deformed the Church's witness but has obscured the heart of the gospel. To recover the gospel's clarity, integrity, and

liberating power, the Church must disentangle itself from this alliance. Not to abandon Israel as a people, nor to deny the legitimacy of their security and history, but to break the theological bond that equates loyalty to Christ with loyalty to a modern nation-state.

This is a call to repentance, not political realignment. It is a call to return to the cross, to recover the prophetic tradition, and to rebuild a church that stands not with power, but with peace; not with empire, but with the crucified Christ.

Reclaiming the Prophetic Tradition

To break this alliance, the Church must first reclaim its prophetic voice- the voice that speaks truth to all earthly powers, including those it once championed. This means reviving the tradition of the Hebrew prophets who called Israel to justice, not entitlement; who thundered against injustice and idolatry within their own people, not just their enemies.

It means refusing to sacralize the modern Israeli state with ancient biblical covenants. The promises of God are fulfilled in Christ, not in tanks or territory. Prophecy is not a political blueprint, but a divine critique of injustice and a call to righteousness.

In this light, the Church must speak boldly against any form of nationalism, militarism, or

racial exceptionalism- whether American, Israeli, or otherwise. It must become a conscience, not a chaplain, to the nations.

Decentering the Nation-State Theology

The Church's theological imagination must be liberated from the gravitational pull of the nation-state. The modern political categories of borders, sovereignty, and military alliances are not categories of the kingdom of God.

The early Church knew this. It worshiped a lord who was executed by empire, and it proclaimed a kingdom that transcended every earthly boundary. In that spirit, the Church must resist the pressure to define its mission in relation to Israel, America, or any other national project.

Instead, the Church must rediscover its identity as a transnational body, drawn from all peoples, existing as a sign of God's reconciling love in the world. This means standing in solidarity with Palestinians and Israelis, with the stateless and the citizen, with the refugee and the ruler- but without preference or prejudice.

Re-engaging the Full Gospel of Peace

Breaking the alliance requires a recovery of the full gospel, not the narrow, nationalistic version that justifies dominance, but the gospel of Jesus

Christ, who proclaimed peace, welcomed the stranger, and laid down his life for his enemies.

The Church must reclaim its identity as the community of reconciliation, offering hospitality to both sides of conflict and advocating for justice not as a political demand, but as a divine imperative. It must weep with those who suffer, listen to those who have been silenced, and resist the temptation to read history through the lens of triumphalism or prophetic determinism.

This includes amplifying the voices of Palestinian Christians, who are often erased from the evangelical imagination. Their witness is not only legitimate- it is essential. Their cries echo the cries of the early church under empire: "How long, O Lord?" The Church must no longer choose between them and the prophetic narrative it wants to preserve.

Practicing an Eschatology of Hope, Not Domination

The alliance with Zionism is rooted in an eschatology of fear- a theology that expects destruction, war, and the rise of evil before the return of Christ. This apocalyptic determinism justifies suffering, excuses violence, and welcomes chaos as a sign of the end.

But this is not the eschatology of Jesus. Moltmann reminds us that Christian hope is not

resignation to disaster, but anticipation of a new creation. It is not about escaping the world, but transforming it. The Church must renounce the logic of "prophetic necessity" that treats war as inevitable and instead work for peace as a foretaste of God's coming kingdom.

Breaking the alliance means choosing an eschatology of resurrection over one of ruin. It means refusing to build theology on bloodshed, and instead joining God's work of healing the nations.

Building a New Theological Political Imagination

This final movement is not just about critique- it is about construction. If the Church is to break the sacred alliance, it must cultivate a new imagination: one where justice, peace, and solidarity are central. Where the gospel is not used to justify geopolitical decisions, but to critique them. And where the Church becomes a global fellowship of peacemakers rather than a partisan tribe.

This means re-educating pastors and churches, rethinking mission and advocacy, and revising theological curricula that have uncritically adopted dispensational or Zionist assumptions. It also means listening deeply and humbly to

voices from the Global South, from Jewish peace activists, and from Palestinian Christians whose lived experience must inform our theology.

It is time to rebuild a Christian identity that is free from the chains of empire, faithful to the way of the cross, and rooted in the gospel of peace.

In the chapters ahead, we will explore how this disentangling can happen- through reformed eschatology, renewed ecclesiology, and a reimagined political theology grounded not in fear or prophecy charts, but in the risen Christ who makes all things new.

PART III: The Politics of the Kingdom of God

Chapter Eight
The Kingdom of God vs. The Empire of Man

I. Two Competing Allegiances

The story of Christianity begins not with an empire, but with a kingdom- not of this world. From the first beat of Jesus' ministry, he announced that a new reign was breaking into history: "*The kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."* This kingdom was not built on power, wealth, or domination, but on forgiveness, mercy, justice, and peace. It stood in radical contrast to every political regime that claimed sovereignty over the human soul.

But from Constantine to the present, this kingdom has been domesticated, repackaged, and enlisted to serve the empires it came to judge. The modern church stands at a dangerous crossroads; it must choose between two competing allegiances- the kingdom of God or the empire of man. It cannot serve two masters.

This section marks the transition from analysis to confrontation. We are no longer simply critiquing Christian nationalism or its alliance with

Zionism. We are laying the foundation for a reconstructed theology- a vision of Christian identity rooted in the crucified Messiah, not Caesar.

The Gospel is Political- But Not Partisan

Modern Christians, particularly in the United States, are often told that their faith should not be "political." But this sentiment is misleading. The gospel is inherently political- not because it aligns with a political party, but because it makes political claims about who truly rules the world.

To proclaim: "Jesus is Lord" is to simultaneously declare that Caesar is not. It is to subvert every imperial claim to ultimate authority, and to declare the reign of Christ as the only legitimate source of hope, justice, and peace. The early Christians understood this. That is why they were seen as a threat to Rome- not because they led insurrections, but because they refused to confess the emperor as lord.

In our time, the Church has too often reduced the gospel to private morality, personal piety, or eternal fire insurance. But the kingdom Jesus preached confronts every political, economic, and religious structure that demands loyalty above

compassion, hierarchy above humility, violence above love. It is political because it upends the foundations of worldly power. But it is not partisan, because it refuses to be contained by any party, state, or flag.

Empire: The Mimicry of the Kingdom

Empires are not simply political arrangements. They are theological systems. They offer counterfeit versions of what the kingdom of God promises:

- Security in place of peace
- Order in place of justice
- Glory in place of humility
- Power in the place of love

Empires demand sacrifice, but not the self-giving love of the cross- they demand the sacrifice of the weak for the comfort of the strong. They promise salvation through might, stability through control, and identity through exclusion.

In this sense, empires always try to mimic the kingdom, even while resisting its actual values. They co-opt religious language, symbols, and rituals to sanctify their violence. They build temples to national greatness, altars to military power, and creeds of patriotic devotion. And too often, the Church has given them permission.

A History of Betrayal

The entanglement of Christianity with empire is not new. From the moment Constantine saw a vision of the cross and used it to wage war, the Church began a long history of betraying its Messiah by adopting the tools of Caesar.

That betrayal continues wherever the church trades its prophetic voice for political access. It happens when Christians rally around strongmen who promise order and power. It happens when the name of Jesus is used to justify the bomb, the drone, the border wall, or the occupation. It happens when worship becomes a pageant of nationalism and sermons become campaign endorsements.

The empire of man always offers the same deal: "Worship me and I will give you the kingdoms of this world." It is the temptation Satan laid before Jesus- and the one many Christians have failed to resist.

But Jesus answered differently. He rejected power on the empire's terms and chose instead the way of the cross.

The Kingdom of the Crucified

The kingdom of God is not built by force or maintained by fear. It is not established through conquest, elections, or legislation. It is not a Christian version of the nation-state. It is the reign of the crucified and risen Christ- a kingdom of the

poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and those who hunger for justice.

This kingdom has no borders. It gathers enemies around one table. It topples the mighty and lifts up the lowly. It is slow like a seed, quiet like yeast, and unstoppable like resurrection.

To pledge allegiance to this kingdom is to break allegiance with the empire of man. It is to stop seeking justice for the oppressed. It is to love our enemies instead of annihilating them. It is to see every person- not just those who share our passport or our prophecy- as a bearer of divine image and worth.

The Church at the Crossroads

We now stand at a theological crossroads. Will we continue to wed the gospel to the empire, defending our nation's interests as if they were God's? Or will we repent, disentangle ourselves from the imperial vision, and return to the kingdom that comes not through coercion, but through cruciform love?

This chapter will explore this confrontation in full. The sections ahead will contrast the values of empire with the ethic of the kingdom, explore the early church's resistance to imperial theology, and outline how the Church today can recover its true political identity- not as a voting bloc, but as an alternative society.

The way of the empire is wide, and many have walked it. But the way of the kingdom is narrow, and it leads to life.

II. Empire's Values vs. Kingdom Ethics

The contrast between the kingdom of God and the empire of man is not merely a difference in structure —it is a clash of values. The two are animated by opposing moral logics. Where one builds its power through domination, the other exalts humility. Where one thrives on fear, the other is rooted in love. These opposing values are not abstract ideals; they shape lives, nations, policies, and churches.

For Christians living within the gravitational pull of empire —whether Rome, Nazi Germany, modern America, or the Israeli state- faithfulness requires a radical discernment. It means learning to identify the subtle ways the empire seduces, distorts, and co-opts the Church’s moral vision. In this section, we confront those moral contrasts head-on.

Power vs. Servanthood

Empires are built on the assertion of power. They rise through force, defend themselves through violence, and assert their legitimacy through displays of strength- military, economic, and cultural. Empire worships the strongman, the

conqueror, the “deal-maker.” It rewards domination and punishes weakness.

By contrast, the kingdom of God is founded on servanthood. Jesus did not come to wield the sword of Caesar, but to wash the feet of his disciples. When his followers argued over who was the greatest, he placed a child in their midst. When they reached for thrones, he pointed them to the cross.

“You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them…It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.” (Matthew 20.25-26)

The Church must ask itself; whose power do we celebrate? Do our leaders imitate Jesus or Caesar? Do our churches reflect the humility of Christ or the posturing of empire?

Violence vs. Peace

Empire is addicted to violence. It uses it to expand borders, enforce order, and silence dissent. Violence is not just a tool of empire- it is its moral currency. Every empire tells itself that violence is necessary for peace, and that killing is justified in the name of national security or divine promise.

The kingdom of God, however, is built by the Prince of Peace. Jesus rebuked the sword in Gethsemane, forgave his executioners from the

cross, and told his followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. The cross is not a banner of military triumph- it is the end of vengeance and the judgment of violence itself.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5.9)

When Christians cheer for war, justify occupation, or bless the bombs of empire, they abandon the ethics of their King. The Church must recover its peace witness, not as political naivete, but as gospel fidelity.

Exclusion vs. Embrace

Empires define themselves by who belongs and who does not. Their politics are built on borders, walls, and exclusion. They create enemies, stigmatize the 'other', and maintain loyalty through fear of outsiders. Citizenship becomes salvation, and nationalism becomes identity.

By contrast, the kingdom of God welcomes the stranger. It calls all people into a new humanity, one not marked by blood, soil, or ancestry, but by shared participation in the life of Christ. It dismantles ethnic superiority and national exceptionalism.

“In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all, and in all.” (Colossians 3.11)

When the Church excludes others based on race, nationality, or ideology, it ceases to be a foretaste of the kingdom and becomes a mirror of the empire.

Fear vs. Love

The empire governs by fear- fear of enemies, of change, of scarcity, of the 'other'. Fear is its engine and its justification. It tells people that without its strength, they will be overrun, betrayed, or destroyed.

The kingdom of God casts out fear through perfect love. Jesus constantly told his disciples, "*Do not be afraid."* The early Church faced lions, prisons, and crosses not with panic, but with songs. Their courage was not based on national pride but on resurrection hope.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (1John 4.18)

When churches operate from fear- fear of losing power, fear of political opponents, fear of foreigners- they testify not to the gospel but to the empire's gospel of control.

Glory vs. The Cross

Empires seek glory. They are obsessed with image, spectacle, and success. Their temples are filled with flags and flames. They love winners.

Their gods are gold-plated, and their heroes are victorious generals and powerful kings.

But the kingdom of God exalts a crucified messiah. It is not ashamed of weakness. Its glory is not in conquest but in compassion. Its king is crowned with thorns, not gold. His throne is a cross. His triumph is found in suffering love.

"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise…what is weak…to shame the strong." (1Corinthians 1.27)

When Christians seek influence, dominance, or cultural supremacy in Jesus' name, they have already traded him for empire.

A Different Kind of Witness

These contrasts are not merely ideals- they are not diagnostic tools by which the Church can measure its own faithfulness. Wherever we see power celebrated over servanthood, violence defended over peace, exclusion practiced over embrace, fear preached over love, and glory pursued over the cross, we are seeing the kingdom of God being eclipsed by the empire of man.

This is not a partisan critique. It is a kingdom critique. Whether the empire comes with red flags or blue banners, Israeli tanks or American slogans, it is still an empire- and it must be named,

resisted, and rejected by a Church faithful to Christ.

The next section will explore how the early Church embodied this resistance, living out the ethics of the kingdom in a world dominated by empire- and how their example must shape our witness today.

III. The Early Church Against Empire

The earliest Christians were not culture warriors. They did not seek political power, draft legislation, or baptize Caesar's wars. They did not form political parties or demand that Rome become more "Christian." And yet, their faith threatened the empire far more than any armed rebellion. Why? Because they lived as if Jesus, not Caesar, was Lord.

In doing so, the early Church became a revolutionary presence within the Roman world. Their allegiance to the crucified Christ shaped not only their worship but also their economics, ethics, and public life. They refused to kill, refused to lie, refused to worship the emperor, and refused to bow down to the gods of empire. They were a counter-politics, an alternative society, a prophetic community in exile.

As the Church today navigates the seductions of empire and nationalism, we must remember the witness of the early Church, not with nostalgia, but

with a commitment to reclaim its countercultural identity. Their resistance was not rooted in political strategy or revolutionary violence, but in a total reorientation of allegiance. They believed that to follow Jesus was to live in a fundamentally different way- to form a community that mirrored the kingdom of God in the midst of a world shaped by empire. This meant rejecting the empire's values, refusing to kill in its name, declining to worship its idols, and offering instead a living alternative- a Church that bore the shape of the cross, not the sword.

A Kingdom in Contrast

The Roman Empire was built on conquest, maintained through fear, and sustained by the worship of power. Its theology was imperial: Caesar was "lord," "savior,: and even "son of god." The emperor's image adorned coins, temples, and decrees. Peace was achieved through domination. What the empire called 'Pax Romana' was actually the quiet that follows military subjugation.

Into this world came a Galilean peasant proclaiming another kingdom. Jesus' message was not simply spiritual; it was politically explosive. To call him "Lord" was to deny that title to Caesar. To declare the coming of the kingdom of God was to announce a regime change at the cosmic level.

And when Jesus was crucified- a Roman punishment reserved for enemies of the state- it was because he represented a threat to the order of the empire.

The early Church inherited this radical posture. They understood that to follow Jesus was to step outside the imperial imagination and into a new kind of society- one where the last are first, enemies are loved, the poor are blessed, and the powerful are brought low.

A People Set Apart

In his prayer for us Jesus said, *"They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." "Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct"* (1 Peter 1.15). The early Christians were not defined by their power, but by their difference. They rejected the empire's violence. Many refused military service, not because they hated Rome, but because they believed the shedding of blood was incompatible with the gospel of peace.

They rejected the empire's gods. They would not burn incense to the emperor, nor participate in imperial festivals. They were branded as atheists, not because they believed in nothing, but because they believed in a God who could not be used for political control.

They rejected the empire’s hierarchy. In a world divided by class, gender, and ethnicity, the Church gathered as a new humanity- Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, rich and poor- at one table. This communion was political. It said: the empire’s categories do not define us. We are citizens of another kingdom.

This was not private piety. It was public defiance. And the empire responded with persecution, not because Christians were violent, but because they were uncontrollable. They could not be conscripted into the imperial religion.

Martyrs, Not Crusaders

The early Church knew that faithfulness to Christ might mean death, and they accepted that risk. They didn't seek to overthrow Rome with violence; they exposed it by their witness. The blood of the martyrs was not shed on the battlefield, but in the arenas- unarmed, singing, forgiving.

This is the scandal of the cross: that God’s power is revealed not through domination, but through suffering love. The early Church did not merely believe this- they embodied it.

In contrast, modern Christian nationalism and Zionist eschatology glorify power, justify war, and promise triumph. But the early Church’s eschatology was cruciform, that is, shaped by the

cross. They longed for the return of Christ not to vindicate their nation, but to complete the reconciliation of all things. Their hope was not geopolitical- it was cosmic and universal.

What We Forgot at Constantine

All of this changed when the Church gained power. With Constantine's conversion in the fourth century, Christianity went from a persecuted faith to a state religion. The cross, once a symbol of suffering, was painted on shields. The Church inherited the empire and gradually became it, adopting its structures, symbols, and strategies.

This Constantinian shift marks one of the great theological betrayals of Christian history. From this point on, the Church began to serve power rather than challenge it. It made peace with hierarchy, with violence, and with exclusion. It became not a witness against empire, but its moral justification.

This legacy remains with us- in American civil religion, in evangelical support for military might, in Zionist theology that blesses occupation, and in a Church that confuses discipleship with patriotism.

To recover the power of the early Church, we must reclaim its posture: not of dominance, but of faithful dissent. Not of control, but of compassion. Not of empire, but of the kingdom.

The Way Forward

The early Church did not change the world by conquering it. It changed the world by being different from it. In their love, their courage, their refusal to bow to the gods of empire, they bore witness to a kingdom not made by human hands. That is our calling again.

Next, we will explore how the Church today can reimagine its political identity- not as a chaplain of the empire, but as an alternative community of the kingdom. We will look at models of faithful resistance, global perspectives, and practices that can anchor the church in a new (and ancient) allegiance.

IV. The Church as an Alternative Polis

In the face of empire's seduction, the Church is not called to dominate it, imitate it, or even to reform it- but to be an alternative to it. The earliest Christians did not conceive of the Church as a private religious association or a compartmentalized spiritual experience. They saw themselves as a new kind of polis, a radically different society, bound not by race, nation, or law, but by the self-giving love of Christ.

This was not a metaphor. It was their lived reality. The church functioned as a visible, embodied critique of imperial power by existing as

a community of peace, generosity, justice, and enemy love in the very heart of an empire built on conquest and hierarchy.

Today, the Church must recover this imagination. In a world dominated by the empire of man- whether through nationalism, militarism, or religious exceptionalism- the people of God are called to be an eschatological community; a foretaste of the world to come, lived now in resistance to the world as it is.

A Visible Witness

The power of the early Church was not in its political influence, but in its visibility as a contrast society. Christians cared for the poor while the empire discarded them. They formed networks of mutual aid, shared resources, and resisted the economic exploitation that undergirded Roman wealth.

Their lives were marked by holiness, but not the kind that isolates- it was the holiness that healed. Their gatherings were scandalous because they brought together slave and free, Jew and Gentile, men and women, rich and poor in a society built on rigid class and ethnic lines. In doing so, they displayed a new order not enforced by Caesar's sword, but animated by Christ's Spirit.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship…All who believed were

together and had everything in common...And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (Acts 2.42-47)

This wasn't utopian idealism. It was political resistance through communal fidelity. The Church was not withdrawing from the world; it was demonstrating that another world was possible- a world where peace does not depend on empire, and hope is not held hostage by the state.

The Politics of the Eucharist

Nothing symbolized this alternative polis more powerfully than the Eucharist.

In the empire, meals were social hierarchies- rituals that reinforced class, status, and loyalty to Rome. But in the Church, the Lord's Supper broke down those boundaries. At the table of Christ, no one was superior. The body of Christ was broken for all. The wine of the new covenant flowed freely to every repentant soul, regardless of bloodline or citizenship.

The Eucharist was not a private devotional moment- it was an act of political subversion. It wasn't a ritualistic "sacrament" instituted and performed by clergy; it was a protest against the scarcity economics of empire. It was a visible renunciation of violence, vengeance, and exclusion. It was a sign that the world had already begun to change, and that the kingdom was

already breaking in. It was done as a communal "agape feast" to re-enact the supper of Christ in remembrance of the eschatological hope of the coming kingdom and new creation.

In our time, when the Church aligns the table with political ideology, refuses fellowship to those of opposing views, or celebrates national identity in the sanctuary, we betray the meaning of the Eucharist.

To reclaim the Church’s witness, we must return to this table as a place of radical inclusion and prophetic resistance, not cultural conformity.

The Church as a Stateless People

To be an alternative polis is also to live as a people in exile. The Church has no national home. Its citizenship is in heaven- not as escapism, but as allegiance. It is not tied to the fortunes of an earthly empire. It transcends borders. It critiques every flag, including its own.

This does not mean withdrawal from public life. It means engagement from a position of theological independence. The Church advocates for justice, defends the vulnerable, and seeks the peace of the city- not as partisans of empire, but as ambassadors of another kingdom.

The Church does not need to seize the power to be faithful. In fact, the pursuit of power has often corrupted the Church more than persecution ever

did. What it needs is clarity of identity- to know that it is not Rome's partner, America's conscience, or Israel's shield, but the body of Christ crucified and raised.

Practicing the Politics of the Kingdom

If the Church is to be a faithful alternative polis in our day, it must cultivate practices that shape its members as citizens of the kingdom:

- Hospitality that welcomes the refugee, the outcast, the enemy.
- Nonviolence that refuses to kill for any nation, even its own.
- Shared life that dismantles economic injustice and practices mutual care.
- Truth-telling that exposes the lies of empire even when they come dressed in religious garb.
- Worship that centers Christ- not the flag, not the state, not the cultural idols of success and power.

These practices are not accessories to Christian life- they are the politics of the gospel. They train the Church to live in the shape of the cross, and to resist the constant pull to conform to the empire's logic.

A Challenge to the Church Today

The modern Church is too often seduced by the illusion of relevance. It trades its distinctiveness for access. It baptizes state violence in the name of divine protection. It becomes a voting bloc rather than a holy people. But in doing so, it forfeits its prophetic power.

The world does not need a Church that mirrors its divisions. It needs a Church that lives as if the resurrection actually happened- as if Jesus really is Lord and Caesar is not.

This will require repentance, that is, the turning away from its allegiance to empire and returning to the liberating way of Jesus.. It will require courage. It will require disentangling from political alliances that promise safety but demand compromise. But it is the only path to faithfulness.

The next and final section of this chapter will explore what it means for the Church to make a decisive break from the logic of empire and fully embrace the kingdom- not as an abstract theology, but as a concrete way of being in the world.

V. Allegiance to the Kingdom Alone

The Church cannot serve two masters. It cannot pledge allegiance to both the crucified Christ and the empires of this world. It cannot wave the flag and lift the cross without eventually compromising one for the other. To be the Church is to belong wholly to the kingdom of God, and that requires an

intentional, visible, and sustained break from the logic of empire.

This section is not merely a critique- it is a call to conversion. The question before us is not whether Christians can participate in politics, but whether our ultimate allegiance is to the Lamb who was slain or to the beast of national power.

The Idolatry of Dual Allegiance

Throughout Christian history, the attempt to serve both God and empire has led not to balance, but to betrayal. From Constantine to colonialism, from Christendom to Christian nationalism, the Church has repeatedly compromised its identity in the pursuit of influence. The cost has always been the same: the gospel is emptied of its meaning, and Jesus is reduced to a tribal mascot for national glory.

Jesus was clear: *“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Mrk 6.24).* The same applies to the throne. You cannot serve Christ and Caesar. You cannot crucify your enemies and love them at the same time. You cannot preach peace while defending war. You cannot belong to the kingdom of God and give your soul to the empire of man.

To reclaim its witness, the Church must renounce its dual allegiance- not just in word, but in posture, practice, and power. It must refuse to carry the empire’s sword, refuse to baptize its myths, and refuse to call its idols holy.

A New Declaration of Allegiance

What would it mean for the Church to declare allegiance to the kingdom of God alone? It would not mean political disentanglement, but political reorientation. The Church would no longer measure faithfulness by party loyalty, military strength, or national destiny. It would measure faithfulness by the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, the ministry of reconciliation, and the way of the cross.

This declaration would require the Church to say:

- We are not Americans who happen to be Christians. We are Christians who happen to be Americans.
- We do not believe God blessed nations based on their strength, but on their justice to the poor.
- We do not believe any state- America, Israel, or otherwise- can serve as the fulfillment of God’s kingdom.
- We reject theologies that glorify war, demonize the 'other', and turn prophecy into political calculation.

- We confess that Jesus is Lord, and therefore, no nation, president, or party can be.

This declaration is not abstract theology. It is discipleship.

The Cost of the Kingdom

Allegiance to the kingdom comes at a cost. It may mean being misunderstood, marginalized, or mocked. It may mean losing social standing, political access, or institutional funding. It may mean tension with family, congregation, or culture. It will certainly mean breaking fellowship with the empire's gospel of dominance.

But the cost is worth it, because what we gain is freedom.

- Freedom from fear.
- Freedom from idolatry.
- Freedom from the need to justify injustice.
- Freedom to love our enemies, welcome the stranger, and serve the least.
- Freedom to be the Church of the crucified Christ, not the chaplain of empire.

As Dietrich Bonhoefer wrote in the shadow of the Third Reich: "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others." Not for the state. Not for its own preservation. But for the poor, the voiceless, the victimized, the enemy- those who have no place in the empire's vision, but are central to the kingdom of God.

A Church for the World to Come

To belong to the kingdom is to live now in light of the world that is coming. It is to be a preview of the age where swords are beaten into plowshares, where nations do not rise against nations, and where every tear is wiped away.

The empire has no imagination for such a world. But the Church must. We are not simply waiting for the kingdom to arrive- we are called to embody it now. Every time we welcome rather than exclude, forgive rather than retaliate, tell the truth rather than protect our tribe, we enact the kingdom in the shadow of empire. The Church is not called to win. It is called to be faithful.

Conclusion: A Church Unshackled

The gospel is not a footnote to foreign policy. The Church is not a vessel for nationalist dreams. The cross is not a flagpole. Jesus is not an agent of empire. He is its undoing.

The Church must unshackle itself from all allegiances that dilute its witness. It must stand with the crucified, not with the crucifiers. It must remember that its citizenship is not in any earthly nation, but in the kingdom that cannot be shaken.

To live with allegiance to the kingdom alone is not to abandon the world- it is to love it more deeply. But it is to love it as Christ does: not by

conquering, but by serving; not by ruling, but by redeeming.

The way forward is clear. The only question is whether we will walk it.

Chapter Nine
Exile, Not Empire

I. The Temptation to Belong

The longing to belong is one of the most powerful human impulses. It can shape identity, forge community, and even drive theology. It is no different for the Church. In a fragmented, hostile, and often chaotic world, the Church has often sought stability, safety, and legitimacy by anchoring itself in the structures of empire. But in doing so, it has frequently abandoned its true vocation- not as empire's partner, but as a people in exile.

Throughout history, the Church has faced recurring temptation: to trade its exilic identity for a sense of home with the empire. This temptation is understandable. Empire offers the Church influence. It offers protection. It offers cultural acceptance. It offers a seat at the table of power, a role in writing the laws, and a platform to shape the future. What it demands in return is simple: loyalty.

But loyalty to empire always comes at the cost of loyalty to the kingdom of God. The Church cannot belong to both. And in seeking to belong somewhere it does not, it forgets where it truly does.

Empire's False Promise of Belonging

Every empire promises a home. It offers identity through national mythology, security through militarized borders, and purpose through participation in its story. It welcomes the Church not by outright persecution, but by slow assimilation. It tells Christians, "You can serve Christ- just do it in a way that also serves Caesar."

And the Church, weary of marginalization and eager for relevance, often accepts the offer.

In America, this temptation has taken the form of civil religion: a blend of biblical language and patriotic fervor, where Jesus is clothed in red, white, and blue. In Israel, it is the claim of divine right to land, where God's promise is used to justify permanent occupation. In Russia, it is the Orthodox blessing of state violence, dressed as the defense of holy tradition.

These are not isolated phenomena. They are symptoms of a deeper theological drift: a Church that has forgotten it is in exile, and instead believes it has come home.

Israel in Babylon: A Model for the Church

The biblical narrative offers a clear alternative. When Israel was exiled to Babylon, it lost its temple, its king, its land- everything that had once defined its national and religious identity. What remained was a question: Who are we now?

The answer came not through conquest or return, but through faithful exile.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon: *"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."* (Jeremiah 29:7)

This was not a call to assimilation. Nor was it a call to rebellion. It was a call to faithful presence in the midst of a foreign land, refusing both separation and seduction. They were not to become Babylonians, but neither were they to isolate themselves. They were to embody the presence of God in exile. This is the Church's calling too.

The Illusion of Return

Many modern expressions of Christian nationalism are rooted in the desire to "return"- to reclaim a supposed past era of Christian dominance or moral clarity. Whether it's "Make America Great Again" or the Zionist dream of a restored theocratic Israel, these narratives hinge on the idea that the people of God are out of place unless they are in power.

But biblically, exile is not something to be undone by force. It is a space where faith is refined, idolatry is exposed, and hope is redefined.

The call of the gospel is not to seize power to make the Church feel at home, but to embrace displacement as discipleship. The Church is not called to return to empire. It is called to embody the kingdom within it- without becoming part of it.

The Modern Church's Identity Crisis

When the Church forgets it is in exile, it loses its prophetic voice. It becomes obsessed with cultural influence, fearful of irrelevance, and fixated on political access. It defends its "rights" rather than taking up its cross. It seeks to win rather than to witness. It baptizes empire's myths rather than exposing them.

This crisis of identity is not new. But in our time, it has become urgent.

The Church in America, in Israel, in Russia, and in every nation where it seeks power has a choice to make: Will it continue to grasp for legitimacy within empire? Or will it return to its exilic vocation- a people without a homeland, whose citizenship is in a kingdom not built by human hands.

II. Exile as Calling, Not Punishment

In the popular imagination, exile is often seen as a curse. It evokes an image of loss, defeat, and abandonment- a people cast out from their land, stripped of their power, longing to return. In this

view, exile is God's judgment, and return is God's blessing. But scripture tells a more complex- and more liberating- story.

Exile is not only punishment. In fact, it is often a profound calling. It is the space in which the people of God are purified, reshaped, and re-centered- not on land, king, or temple, but on God alone. It is the crucible where idolatry is burned away and a new kind of faithfulness is born. In exile, the people of God are no longer at the center of power- and that is precisely what makes their witness powerful.

For the Church today, the recovery of exile as a theological vocation is not just a corrective to nationalism- it is a pathway back to the heart of the gospel.

Jeremiah's Radical Word

When Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 BC, many in Judah assumed it was a temporary setback. The prophets of nationalism, like Hananiah, proclaimed that the exile would be short-lived, that God would soon "break the yoke" of Babylon, and that the temple vessels and Davidic kingship would be restored. Their message was clear: "God is on our side. He will make Israel great again." But Jeremiah spoke a different word.

Writing to the exiles, Jeremiah shattered the illusion of quick restoration. He told them not to

resist Babylon, but to settle there. Not to wage war, but to build homes, plant gardens, raise families, and seek the peace of the city. In other words, embrace the exile. Live as if this is where you belong- even if it isn't home.

"This is what the Lord Almighty says...Build houses and live in them...Seek the welfare of the city...pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29.5-7)

Jeremiah's message was not defeatist. It was deeply hopeful- but it was hope redefined. Not a hope in political return or national restoration, but hope in the presence of God with his people, even in a foreign land.

Daniel: Faithfulness in the Belly of Empire

The Book of Daniel gives us a vivid picture of what this exilic calling looks like in practice. Daniel and his companions were not revolutionaries. They did not try to overthrow Babylon or stage protests in the name of Yahweh. But neither did they assimilate.

They served the empire with integrity, but refused to bow to its gods. They worked within the system, but bore witness to a different kingdom. Their refusal to eat defiled food, their prayers facing Jerusalem, their rejection of imperial idolatry, and their willingness to suffer for truth all

demonstrate that exile is not a retreat from mission- it is its context.

Daniel shows us that even within the belly of empire, it is possible to live faithfully, courageously, and distinctly. Not by wielding power, but by remaining rooted in identity. Not by seeking control, but by trusting in God's sovereignty over history.

This is the model the Church must recover.

Exile as the Space of Prophetic Identity

Exile is where the prophets are formed. It is the space where God strips away illusion and clarifies identity. In exile, there are no kings to prop up, no temples to hide behind, no national myths to protect. There is only the raw, unsettling reality that the people of God are not at home in the world- and never were meant to be.

Ezekiel's visions, Isaiah's poetry, the lamentations of Jeremiah- all arose out of the experience of displacement. Exile sharpened their vision. It made them dangerous- not to their enemies, but to the idolatry within their own people.

The Church in exile becomes prophetic not by standing over the world in condemnation, but by living within it with clarity, compassion, and contradiction. It speaks not from the palace, but

from the margins. Not as a power broker, but as a suffering servant.

John of Patmos: Revelation from Exile

The Book of Revelation is the New Testament's clearest voice of exile. Written by John while exiled on the island of Patmos under Roman persecution, it is addressed to churches struggling to remain faithful in the midst of imperial pressure, cultural compromise, and violent suppression. Like Jeremiah and Daniel, Revelation is not an escape hatch- it is a survival manual for exiles.

John unveils the empire as it truly is- Babylon the Great, drunk on the blood of the saints, demanding worship, seducing with wealth and violence. And he presents a radical contrast: a slain Lamb who reigns not by force, but by faithful witness; a kingdom of priests who conquer not with swords, but through perseverance and truth.

"Come out of her, my people," the voice declares, "*so that you do not take part in her sins."* (Revelation 18.4)

This is the heart of the exilic calling: not to flee the world, but to refuse its idolatry. Revelation calls the church to see clearly, suffer faithfully, and bear witness to the coming kingdom even while living in the heart of the empire.

Jesus: The Exile Who Comes To Us

The calling of exile finds its climax in Jesus Christ. He is the truest exile- born in a borrowed manger, raised under Roman occupation, executed outside the city gates. *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests,"* he said, *"but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."* (Matthew 8.20).

Jesus did not come to restore a national kingdom. He rejected the zealot's sword and the Pharisee's compromise. Instead, he gathered an exilic community- fishermen, tax collectors, zealots, women, the poor, the sick, and the outcast- and called them the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city on a hill. A people in exile, living as a sign of another kingdom.

This is still the church's calling. Not to possess the land, but to carry the cross. Not to build Christian empires, but to form communities of hope and holiness in the shadow of worldly powers.

III. The Church Among the Nations

The early Church did not inherit political power. It inherited the cross. From the beginning, Christianity was born as a Diaspora faith- spread across cities, scattered among peoples, often marginalized, persecuted, and misunderstood. But it was precisely in this position of exile that the Church found its power. It did not attempt to

conquer the nations by the sword or by legislation, but by living as a new kind of people- a people whose political identity was rooted in the resurrection, not in Rome.

To be the Church was not to possess a homeland, a king, or an enemy. It was to belong to the crucified Christ and live in such a way that made the world take notice- even if it responded with violence. The early Christians understood themselves as resident aliens, temporary dwellers in foreign lands, awaiting a better city, and yet deeply committed to the good of the cities they inhabited.

Their exile was not escapist. It was mission.

Not of This World- But Still in It

Jesus' prayer in John 17 is a manifesto for the exilic Church:

"They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world...As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." (John 17.16,18)

This is the paradox of the world the early Church embraced: they were not of the world, but they were sent into it. Their call was not to domination, but to incarnation- to the living presence of Christ in the midst of empire.

They did not form armies or political parties. They did not petition Caesar for legal status or

demand cultural control. Instead, they met in homes, prayed for their enemies, cared for the sick, rescued abandoned infants, and proclaimed a gospel that undermined the empire's very foundations: *Jesus is Lord*.

This was not private religion. It was public treason.

Their Politics Were Ecclesial

The early Church didn't separate faith from politics- they redefined politics altogether. The Church itself was a political body, not in the sense of partisan allegiance or national governance, but in the sense that it was an alternative polis- a city, a common life, a people governed by the ethic of the kingdom rather than the laws of Caesar.

Their political acts were radical:

- Baptism marked a change in citizenship- from the kingdoms of this world to the kingdom of God.
- The Eucharist was a meal that subverted Roman social hierarchy and proclaimed a new world.
- Confessing "Jesus is Lord" was a direct rejection of Caesar's claim to divinity and authority.

This was not a withdrawal from political life, but a reconstitution of it from below- through worship, solidarity, and sacrifice.

Suffering, Not Supremacy

The church's strategy for changing the world was not through winning but through witnessing- even unto death. Their power was not in legislation but in martyrdom. And their loyalty was not to empire, but to the kingdom.

Late in the 2nd century, Tertullian wrote: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." They didn't conquer Rome with swords. They outlived it, and out-loved it, and eventually, they outlasted it.

Their perseverance exposed the lie of Roman peace. Their joy mocked the terror of Roman violence. Their mutual care undermined the cruelty of Roman economics. And their refusal to worship Caesar was not political rebellion- it was spiritual fidelity.

The Danger of Forgetting Exile

The danger today is that the Church forgets this history. It forgets what made the early Church so powerful. In our thirst for relevance and control, we seek the privileges of empire rather than the presence of God. We want influence without incarnation, victory without vulnerability, resurrection without crucifixion.

But the early Church bore witness not by seeking to rule the nations, but by being a

different kind of nation- a holy people scattered among the nations, proclaiming by their lives that a better kingdom had already come.

This is still our calling.

IV. Refusing the Illusion of Home

The Church is most vulnerable not when it is persecuted, but when it is welcomed by empire. It is in that moment of embrace that the Church is tempted to believe it has finally come home- that the nation has become holy, that its culture is Christian, that its institutions carry divine favor. But this is a dangerous illusion. For a Church that believes it has found its home in empire has already forgotten it was meant to live in exile.

Nationalism thrives on this illusion. It tells the Church, "This land is your promised land. This nation is your inheritance. Its story is your story. Defend it at all costs." And the Church, flattered and seduced, begins to confuse its faith with its flag, its hope with its homeland, its worship with its patriotism.

But the story of Scripture tells us something different. The people of God are always a pilgrim people. They are never fully at home in the world. From Abraham to Jesus, from the wilderness to the cross, the call has always been to live in tension-

to seek the welfare of the city, but never mistake it for Zion.

The Myth of the Christian Nation

Every attempt to forge a "Christian nation" ends in idolatry. Whether it's Rome after Constantine, Geneva under Calvin, Puritan New England, modern Israel, or contemporary Christian nationalism in America, the result is the same: the gospel is co-opted by power, holiness is replaced by cultural conformity, and the Church becomes chaplain to the state.

In these settings, faith is domesticated. Jesus is reduced to a mascot of national virtue. The cross is emptied of its scandal and made into a symbol of triumph. The Church becomes the defender of empire, rather than its prophetic conscience.

When this happens, exile is no longer seen as a vocation- it is seen as a problem to be solved. And the result is a Christianity that bears little resemblance to the Jesus who had no place to lay his head.

Zionism and the Nationalization of Promise

The modern Zionist movement- particularly in its Christian dispensationalist form- offers a striking example of how exile can be misread. In the biblical story, exile was never just geographical; it

was spiritual. God's promises were always tied to covenant faithfulness, not territorial possession.

But in modern political theology, the return to the land has often been recast as a divine right, detached from justice, repentance, or righteousness. Israel becomes not a symbol of messianic hope, but a nationalist project. The land becomes a political entitlement. The call to be a light to the nations is eclipsed by a strategy of survival and strength.

The Church, when it aligns itself with this narrative, forgets that it too is in exile- and instead imagines that the return to political power is a sign of divine favor. This is not the path of the gospel. The Church is not called to help establish earthly kingdoms, even religious ones. It is called to bear witness to a kingdom not of this world.

Jesus Had No Place to Lay His Head

The true identity of the Church is revealed in Jesus himself. He was not a citizen of empire. He was not a revolutionary plotting to restore Israel's national sovereignty. He was a wandering rabbi, a healer, a prophet- rejected by his own, crucified by Rome, buried outside the city walls.

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Luke 9.58)

This is not just a biographical detail. It is a theological truth. The Son of God entered the world as an exile. His birth was under occupation. His family fled to Egypt as refugees. His ministry was itinerant. His kingdom did not come by force, but through surrender. His victory was not national liberation, but resurrection.

To follow Jesus is to follow the homeless Messiah. It is to reject every empire's offer of belonging. It is to live with roots in the kingdom of God, not in the soil of any one nation.

Refusing to Call Empire "Zion"

The temptation is always the same: to baptize the nation as holy, to mistake power for providence, and to forget that the Church's true location is not defined by geography or citizenship, but by its allegiance to the crucified and risen Christ.

The Church must refuse to call empire "Zion." It must refuse to call conquest "promise." It must refuse to call its nation "chosen." These are lies that distort the gospel and disfigure the Church.

Instead, it must live as it always has- in exile, faithful, distinct, and full of hope. Not seeking to reclaim a mythical past, but embodying the future promised by God: a city whose architect and builder is the Lord.

V. Hope Beyond Empire

To live in exile is not to live in despair. It is to live with a different kind of hope- not the hope of reclaiming power, but of bearing witness to the world that is coming. It is to resist the myth of redemptive nationalism without falling into cynicism. It is to be a community of memory and anticipation, a people who remember that they are not at home, and who live as signs of the kingdom that will one day come in fullness.

Christian hope is not built on conquest or cultural dominance. It is not found in courts, campaigns, or constitutional amendments. It is found in the resurrection of Jesus, who defeated death not by wielding empire's sword but by submitting to its violence and rising on the other side. This is not the hope of empire's renewal- it is the hope of empire's end.

Prophetic Resistance and Faithful Presence

In Jeremiah's letter to the exiles, he tells them to seek the peace of the city, to plant gardens, and raise families. This is not a call to assimilation, but to faithful presence. Exilic hope is grounded, not escapist. It builds, it serves, it loves- even in Babylon.

But it also resists. The people of God do not become the empire. They refuse to eat the king's food, bow to the golden statue, or pledge allegiance to Caesar as Lord. They say no when

the empire demands idolatry, and yes when God calls them to sacrifice.

This is the tension the Church must embrace: to be in the world, but not of it. To dwell among the nations, but not to become them. To seek the welfare of the city while bearing witness to a kingdom not built by human hands.

The Church as a Sign of the World to Come

The Church's role is not to run the world, but to point beyond it. It is a signpost, a foretaste, a preview of what God is doing to renew all creation. When the Church lives in love, practices justice, welcomes the stranger, breaks bread with the outcast, and confesses Jesus above all other lords- it becomes a living parable of the age to come.

This is what it means to be salt and light: not to dominate the culture, but to be distinct within it. To preserve what is good. To shine in the dark. To live the politics of the kingdom in the midst of the politics of empire.

Hope does not mean triumph. It means faithfulness. It means trusting that God's kingdom will come, even when we cannot see it. It means knowing that Babylon will fall, not because we bring it down, but because it is not eternal. The New Jerusalem does not rise from the ashes of empire- it descends from heaven, adorned like a bride.

Citizens of a Better Country

The author of Hebrews says that the heroes of faith were all strangers and exiles on the earth, seeking a better country- a heavenly one. They did receive the promises in their lifetime, but they lived as if those promises were true.

"Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11.16)

This is the Church's inheritance: not a nation, but a kingdom; not political power, but resurrection life. The exilic Church is not homeless- it is not homesick for a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And in the meantime, it lives as a people of hope, practicing resurrection under the shadow of empire.

Conclusion: The Witness of Exile

The Church must stop trying to come home to empire. It must stop trying to win the culture wars, seize the courts, or reclaim a golden age that never truly existed. Its power is not in returning, but in remaining faithful.

Exile is not the end of the story. It is the place where the story is purified, clarified, and passed on. It is where the Church rediscovers its identity, not as the soul of a nation, but as the body of Christ- broken, given, and alive.

To live in exile is to live honestly. To belong to the kingdom is to hope defiantly. The empire may demand loyalty, but the church belongs to a different Lord. The empire may build walls and wield swords, but the Church plants gardens, opens tables, and carries crosses.

This is the witness of exile. And it is enough.

Chapter Ten
The Cross Against the Sword

I. The Cross is Not a Sword

From the moment Constantine painted a cross on the shields of his soldiers and marched into battle, a deep confusion entered the soul of Christianity. What was once a symbol of executed love, of divine suffering, of voluntary self-giving, was now being used to bless violence, consecrate conquest, and legitimize empire. The cross, that ancient Roman tool of state terror, was no longer the mark of God's suffering solidarity with the oppressed- it had become an imperial emblem, a sword in disguise. That confusion has never fully left us.

In Christian nationalism, especially in its modern forms, the cross is routinely fused with the symbols of state violence- carved into assault rifles, draped in flags, etched onto military graves, or brandished in protest. Jesus' call to "take up your cross" has been twisted into a mandate to wield power instead of surrender it. Cruciform love is replaced with a theology of conquest. The crucified Christ is eclipsed by the glorified nation.

But the cross of Christ and the sword of empire cannot be reconciled. They speak two different languages. The cross is God's "no" to domination. The sword is the empire's "yes" to violence. One is

the path of voluntary suffering love. The other is the machinery of coercion. The cross is the end of religious violence- not its justification.

To confuse them is to lose the gospel itself.

Christianity Weaponized

From Constantine to the Crusades, from colonial conquest to Manifest Destiny, from the Inquisition to the War on Terror, Christianity has been repeatedly weaponized in service of empire. The Church has not only blessed the sword- it has wielded it.

- In the Crusades, popes promised eternal salvation to those who slaughtered Muslims in the name of Christ.
- During the conquest of the Americas, missionaries accompanied conquistadores with sword and cross, forcing baptisms at gunpoint.
- In American history, the myth of manifest destiny baptized expansion, genocide, and enslavement as part of a divine plan.

In each of these cases, the cross was no longer the sign of God's suffering love for the world- it became the logo of a religious empire, justifying violence in God's name.

This is not ancient history. In recent years, Christian imagery has appeared on battlefields, in insurrections, and on political banners calling for

the revolution in the name of Jesus. The message is clear: Christ reigns- but with a sword in his hand.

But this is not the Christ of the Gospels.

Empire's Logic: Power Must Be Taken

Empires understand power in one way: it must be seized, defended, and enforced. This logic requires weapons, laws, armies, and threats. It requires enemies. It justifies violence as a means of preserving peace, punishing wrong, and securing order.

And when the Church adopts this logic, it ceases to be the Church.

Instead of preaching the foolishness of the cross, it proclaims the wisdom of the sword. Instead of turning the other cheek, it trains to strike first. Instead of washing feet, it flexes strength. Instead of following the Lamb who was slain, it imitates the beast who devours.

Christian nationalism does not want a crucified messiah- it wants a militant king. It wants a Jesus who wins, not one who dies. It wants victory on its own terms. And in doing so, it betrays the very gospel it claims to defend.

The Cross as Divine Protest

The cross of Christ is not a tool of statecraft. It is God's protest against it.

It is not simply the place where Jesus died- it is where God unmasked the violence of the world, where empire and religion conspired to kill love incarnate. The cross is not how Jesus saved us- it is how God exposed the true nature of sacred violence. It is the divine judgment on all systems that dominate, scapegoat, and crucify.

"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it." (Colossians 2.15)

This is the paradox: Jesus defeats the powers not by overpowering them, but by absorbing their violence without returning it. The cross is not a battle won through force- it is a victory through love, a triumph through suffering, a conquest through weakness.

The Church Must Choose

The Church today stands at a familiar crossroads. It can carry the cross, or it can carry the sword- but it cannot carry both.

To carry the sword is to rely on coercion, legislation, and cultural dominance. To carry the cross is to follow Jesus into rejection, suffering, and radical love. One path leads to the halls of empire. The other leads to Golgotha.

The question is not whether Christianity will shape public life. It already does. The question is how- as an instrument of power, or as a people of

peace? As defenders of empire, or ambassadors of a crucified King?

If the Church is to recover its soul, it must once again choose the foolishness of the cross over the seduction of the sword. It must become strange again- willing to lose, willing to serve, willing to bleed.

This is not a call to passivity. It is a call to resistance by love- to the only kind of power that can heal the world.

II. The Violence of Christian Nationalism

Christian nationalism does not merely misunderstand the gospel- it reverses it. It takes a faith founded on the broken body of a nonviolent Savior and turns it into a justification for coercion, conquest, and control. Where Jesus said, *"Blessed are the peacemakers,"* Christian nationalism says, "Blessed are the warriors." Where Christ bore the cross, it lifts the sword. It sanctifies violence, not as a tragic necessity, but as a holy mission.

The theology of redemptive violence is the backbone of Christian nationalism. It insists that force can be righteous, that nations can be sanctified through war, and that enemies can be defeated for the glory of God. The result is not only a distorted Christianity, but a violent one- a faith that wages crusades, drops bombs, builds walls, and calls it discipleship.

Redemptive Violence: The Core Myth

At the heart of Christian nationalism is the myth that violence can save. It is the belief that peace is something achieved through domination- that evil can be destroyed if only the right people are in charge, the right laws are passed, and the right enemies are neutralized.

The myth did not begin with Christianity. It is as old as empire itself. Babylon told it. Rome perfected it. But Christian nationalism gives it a theological gloss- it wraps the sword in Scripture.

- In medieval Europe, it meant waging holy wars in the name of Christ.
- In colonial America, it meant displacing and slaughtering indigenous peoples for "God and civilization."
- In modern political theology, it means justifying military expansion, police brutality, or cultural warfare as if defending the kingdom of God.

This is not the gospel. It is the gospel of Caesar, baptized in Christian language.

The American Civil Religion and Sacred Violence

Nowhere is the fusion of cross and sword more evident than in American civil religion. In this framework, the nation itself is treated as sacred-

its founding documents revered like Scripture, its wars remembered as sacred acts of divine providence. Its soldiers portrayed as martyrs, and its flag treated as a holy relic.

Presidents speak of divine destiny. Pledges and prayers are offered interchangeably. Churches hold services that exalt the military, bless weapons, and drape pulpits in flags. The result is a religion where the state is God, and Jesus is its chaplain.

- Sacred violence becomes the central liturgy:
- War is rebranded as liberation.
- Nuclear deterrence is preached as peace.
- Enemies are demonized as threats to God's order.
- Martyrs are redefined- not as peacemakers, but as soldiers who kill for the nation.

In this distorted faith, the cross becomes a license to kill, not a call to die.

From Foreign Wars to Domestic Battles

The violence of Christian nationalism is not limited to foreign policy. It manifests at home through systems of racial injustice, militarized policing, anti-immigrant hostility, and gendered power structures. It turns neighbors into threats and difference into danger. Its primary question is not "Who is my neighbor?" but "Who must I defeat to preserve the nation?"

This produces a siege mentality. The Church becomes a fortress. The world becomes an enemy. And love becomes conditional- reserved for those who look, vote, and believe like "us."

In this theology, the Sermon on the Mount is no longer the constitution of the kingdom- it's optional. "Turn the other cheek" is replaced by "Stand your ground." "Blessed are the strong."

This is not Christianity. it is a nationalist cult wearing a Christian mask.

The Inevitable Idolatry of Violence

Violence always demands justification- and Christian nationalism is ready to supply it. It turns Jesus into a warrior king, Scripture into a weapon, and the Church into an armory. It rewrites the gospel until the Lamb becomes a lion who devours rather than redeems.

But this is not just bad theology. It is idolatry. It replaces the crucified Christ with the image of empire: a God who conquers, controls, and kills.

The more the Church embraces this violence, the more it must silence Jesus. It cannot afford to hear his words too clearly: *"Put your sword back in its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."* (Matthew 26.52)

The truth is too dangerous. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not. If the cross saves, then the sword

cannot. And if love is the way, then violence is a lie.

Jesus stood at the crossroads of religious expectation and imperial pressure- and chose the cross over the sword.

III. Jesus Refuses the Sword

When the moment came- when the empire closed in and the betrayal was complete- Jesus had every reason, and every opportunity, to take up the sword. Instead, he laid it down.

In Gethsemane, the logic of empire clashed with the heart of God. The disciples, gripped by fear and confusion, expected violence. Peter, thinking like a nationalist, drew his weapon. He believed this was the moment to defend the Messiah, to fight for the kingdom. After all, wasn't that what Messiahs were supposed to do- liberate the people from Rome?

But Jesus refused. *"Put your sword back in its place,"* Jesus said, *"for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."* (Matthew 26.52).

That sentence was not just a rebuke of Peter- it was a rebuke of every Christian movement that would come after him, confusing the kingdom of God with the politics of violence.

The Temptation of Power Rejected

From the beginning, Jesus was offered the sword. In the wilderness, Satan tempted him with the kingdoms of the world: *"All these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me."* (Matthew 4.9). It was the offer of empire- power, control, domination. It was an easier way to rule. Jesus said no.

That 'no' echoed throughout his ministry:

- He refused to be made king by force (John 6.15).
- He warned that greatness in the kingdom meant servanthood (Mark 10.42-45).
- He rode into Jerusalem not on a warhorse, but on a donkey (Matthew 21.5).
- He wept over the city's obsession with militarism and missed opportunity of peace (Luke 19.41-44).

Every step of the way, Jesus disarmed expectations- not only by refusing to fight Rome, but by exposing the deeper enemy: the human lust for power.

"My Kingdom Is Not of This World"

Standing before Pilate, Jesus could have mounted a defense. He could have summoned legions of angels. But instead, he bore witness.

"My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world my followers would be fighting..." (John 18.36).

This is the dividing line between Christianity and Christian nationalism. Jesus makes it explicit. His kingdom does not come by violence, coercion, or the domination of enemies. It comes through truth, humility, and suffering love.

To say Jesus is Lord is to say that empire is not. To follow Jesus is not just to believe in him, but to follow him to the cross- to suffer rather than to inflict suffering, to absorb violence rather than return it, to forgive enemies rather than destroy them.

The Cross as God's Refusal to Kill

Jesus' death is not simply the means of atonement- it is God's ultimate refusal to kill in order to save. Instead of inflicting suffering, God endures it. Instead of demanding a sacrifice, God becomes the sacrifice. The cross is the anti-sword. It does not conquer by force; it unveils the lie of redemptive violence and disarms it with love.

"When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly" (1 Peter 2.23).

This is the pattern the Church is called to imitate- not Pilate's pragmatism or Peter's panic, but Jesus' peace.

The Early Church Understood This

Before Constantine, the early Church had no illusions about what it meant to follow a crucified Messiah. Their writings are filled with the language of peace, non-violence, and enemy-love:

- Justin Martyr taught that Christians do not make war but "have converted our weapons into plowshares."
- Tertullian said, "The Lord, in disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier."
- Origen argued that Christians should never kill, not even in self-defense.
- Tertullian also said, "Shall it be held lawful to make an occupation of the sword?", further saying Christians should not be soldiers of the empire.

These were not fringe opinions. They were the consensus of the pre-Constantinian Church. For the first three centuries, Christians refused military service, rejected retaliation, and understood the cross as both their salvation and their calling.

They knew that Jesus had not come to lead an uprising, but to create a new humanity. One not

governed by fear or domination, but by the cruciform love of God.

IV. Bearing the Cross in the Age of Empire

To take up the cross in the time of Jesus was not a religious metaphor. It was a death sentence. Crucifixion was the Roman Empire's brutal warning: This is what happens when you defy Caesar. It was a public display of imperial power- designed to shame, silence, and eliminate those who dared to live differently.

So when Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 16.24, *"Take up your cross and follow me,"* he wasn't offering a poetic image of spiritual hardship. He was calling them to walk a road of public resistance to empire, knowing it would cost them everything. It was a summons to live in opposition to the powers of domination and violence, and to do so not with retaliation, but with the same suffering love that he embodied on Calvary.

In every generation, including our own, the cross continues to stand as a radical challenge- not only to empire, but to every form of Christianity that seeks comfort over courage, control over compassion, nationalism over neighbor-love.

What It Means to Take Up the Cross

To bear the cross in the age of empire is not simply to believe in Jesus. It is to embody his way in a world built on the opposite logic. It means:

- Choosing enemy-love over vengeance.
- Practicing non-violence in a culture of war.
- Embracing weakness in a society that worships strength.
- Living generously under an economy of greed.
- Speaking truth to power, even when it costs us.

The cross is not only the place where Jesus saves the world- it is the shape of the life he calls us to. Paul makes this explicit:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2.20).

Discipleship is cruciform. It is not about winning. It is about witnessing, even when that witness leads to rejection, marginalization, or death.

A Public Ethic of Cruciform Love

The cross is not merely a symbol of private salvation- it is a public ethic, a way of being in the world that refuses the logic of domination. It is not passive. It is profoundly active, but in a radically different key. It resists evil with goodness. It confronts injustice with mercy. It answers violence

not with force, but with truth, presence, and sacrificial solidarity.

This ethic has real consequences:

- It means the Church cannot bless war or militarism.
- It means it must stand with the crucified of the world- the poor, the oppressed, the imprisoned, the colonized, the enslaved.
- It means it must become a people of reconciliation in a world of revenge.

Where Christian nationalism seeks to protect itself, cruciform Christianity gives itself away. Where Christian nationalism demands rights, cruciform faith lays them down for the sake of the other. It is not about self-preservation. It is about faithful presence, even in the face of empire's fury.

The Church Must Remember How to Bleed

There is a kind of Church that dominates the airwaves and headlines- a Church obsessed with access to power, addicted to influence, terrified of decline. It chases cultural relevance, political favor, and legislative wins. But it has forgotten the one thing that makes the Church the Church: the cross.

The early Christians didn't try to take over the empire. They let the empire take their lives. They

bore witness not by seizing the sword, but by enduring it.

Today's Church must remember how to bleed. Not for power. Not for platforms. But for the world. For the truth. For the crucified Christ, who still suffers with the least of these.

To carry the cross is to be willing to lose. To be misunderstood. To be mocked, arrested, even killed- not because we are aggressive, but because we are faithful. It is to love in such a way that empire has no choice but to silence us.

This strange, upside-down way- the way of the cross- is actually the most powerful force in the world; a power that unmasks all false powers, and a hope that even empire cannot kill.

V. The Power of Powerlessness

If empire has taught the world anything, it is this: power belongs to those who take it. That strength is in the sword. That survival comes through domination. That history is written by victors. But the gospel tells a different story.

It tells of a man who had no army, no throne, and no weapons. A man who walked away from crowds when they tried to make him king. A man who stood silent before his accusers. A man who hung on a Roman cross- mocked, bleeding, abandoned. And it tells us that this man, and not Caesar, is Lord.

This is the foolishness of the gospel: that God's power is revealed in weakness, and God's victory comes through defeat.

"For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Corinthians 1.25).

Cruciform Power Is Not Coercion

The cross redefines power. It is not the ability to dominate, to destroy, or to control. It is the power to love unto death, to forgive the unforgivable, to absorb evil without returning it, to bear witness without bending to the fear of death.

This power is not coercive. It is not loud. It does not parade itself. It is the quiet strength of the crucified Christ, who bore the full weight of sin, empire, and religious violence- and broke their power by refusing to imitate them.

Cruciform power is the kind of power that raises the dead, not the kind that builds empires. It is resurrection power. It cannot be legislated. It cannot be weaponized. It cannot be captured by nation or creed. It flows from a different source- from the love of God poured out on the cross.

Why Empire Fears the Cross

Empires do not fear religion. They fear faithful religion- the kind that refuses to bow, refuses to kill, refuses to lie. They fear the church that does

not want to rule, but only to follow Jesus. They fear the witness that says, " We will not be silent. We will not return violence for violence. We will not pretend your kingdoms are eternal."

The early Church understood this. That is why it was persecuted, not embraced. Not because it threatened Rome with rebellion, but because it lived in such radical fidelity to the crucified Christ that Rome could not tolerate the contrast.

Today, a Church that embraces the sword is no threat to empire. It is merely its servant. But a Church that carries the cross- that refuses violence, forgives enemies, and loves without condition- is profoundly dangerous. Because it is free.

Resurrection is the Final Word

The cross is not the end of the story. It is the path to resurrection. But it is a resurrection that vindicates the way of Jesus- not the way of Caesar. The empty tomb is God's declaration that cruciform love wins, not imperial violence.

That is why the early Christians didn't just preach the resurrection as a doctrine- they lived it as a defiance. They sang in prisons. They forgave their torturers. They went to their deaths unarmed and unashamed, because they knew that Caesar could kill their bodies, but not their hope.

In a world drunk on domination, resurrection is the final insult to empire. It says: You lose. The one you killed is alive. And his kingdom will never end.

Conclusion: A Church That Dies Well Lives Well

The Church today must recover the power of powerlessness. It must stop seeking crowns and learn again to carry crosses. It must renounce the logic of empire, repent of its lust for control, and remember the God who ruled from a tree. It must be willing to lose, because only then can it truly win.

In every age, the call is the same: *Follow me.* Not into the courts of power, but into the dust. Not to the throne, but to the cross. Not with a sword in hand, but with open arms.

This is how the world is saved. This is how the Church is renewed. This is the witness that cannot be silenced.

This is the kingdom that has no end.

Chapter Eleven
Faithfulness Beyond Borders

I. No Flag Above the Cross

The early Church did not wave flags. It didn't swear allegiance to Caesar. It didn't gather to celebrate national holidays or pray for military victories. The Church didn't belong to a nation; it belonged to Christ. Its members came from many tribes, tongues, and territories, but they were united by one identity: baptized into the name of Jesus, crucified and risen. Before they were anything else- Jew or Gentile, Roman or foreigner- they were Christians.

That is what Christian nationalism forgets. It places the flag above the cross, or at best, beside it- as if loyalty to Christ and loyalty to country are equal partners, as if following Jesus doesn't challenge every empire's claims to ultimate authority.

But there is no room at Calvary for two lords. The cross is a jealous throne.

Christianity is Not a Tribal Religion

From its inception, the Christian faith was global in scope and radical in its inclusivity. It was born among Jews but opened immediately to non-Jews (Gentiles). It spread from the margins of empire into every language and people group- not as a colonial force, but as a liberating Word that refused to be confined by borders.

Jesus was not the savior of one nation. He did not die to make Israel great again. He did not come to overthrow one empire only to establish another. He came to bring a new kingdom- not defined by geography, ethnicity, or political power, but by the reign of God among the poor, the brokenhearted, the meek, and the merciful.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28.18-19).

To be a Christian, then, is to belong to a transnational kingdom- one that can never be fully

contained within the borders of any nation-state, no matter how "Christian" it claims to be.

The Seduction of Dual Allegiance

Christian nationalism always begins with a simple compromise: Sure, Jesus is Lord- but can't we also be loyal to the nation? Can't we serve two masters? But this is the very question Jesus warns against:

"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other" (Matthew 6.24).

Nationalism demands total loyalty. And over time, it will not tolerate a rival. It will reshape the Church in its image. It will turn pulpits into political platforms and communion tables into stages of patriotic theater. It will make Jesus a mascot for state power. And the Church, if it is not vigilant, will let it happen.

That is why there must be no flag above the cross. Not because love of country is inherently evil- but because the gospel must never be subordinated to the interests of a nation. The Church is not the soul of the state. It is the body of Christ, and its first and final allegiance is to a kingdom that is not of this world.

Jesus is Lord of All- or He Is Not Lord at All

The earliest Christian confession- "Jesus is Lord"- was not a private spiritual statement. It was a public act of defiance. It meant that no other power, no state, no flag, no military, no president, could claim ultimate loyalty.

To say "Jesus is Lord" today is to echo that same defiance. It is to declare that our allegiance is not to America, or Israel, or Russia, or any other national identity. It is to belong to a kingdom that stretches across borders, and languages, and ideologies. It is to be part of a people who do not kill for the kingdom, but suffer for it. Who do not hoard power, but give it away. Who do not build walls, but set tables.

The Church that puts its nation first has already left the gospel behind.

II. Breaking Down the Dividing Walls

In every age, empire has thrived by dividing humanity- by elevating some and marginalizing others, by naming insiders and outsiders, by deciding who belongs and who does not. It creates borders, not just on maps, but in minds and hearts. And then it teaches its people to fear what lies beyond them. But the gospel tells a different story.

"For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the

dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2.14).

Paul wrote these words not as a metaphor, but as a political and spiritual reality. In Christ, the ancient boundary between Jew and Gentile- the deepest ethnic and religious divide of his world- had been abolished. In its place stood a new humanity, a reconciled people, united not by race or nation, but by the cross.

This was not just a theological breakthrough. It was a threat to every system that profits from division.

Empire Needs Walls. The Church Does Not

Empires need boundaries. They must classify, exclude, and dominate. Their power depends on categories: citizen vs. foreigner, ally vs. enemy, clean vs. unclean, worthy vs. unworthy. These distinctions are enforced by violence- at borders, in prisons, through segregation and suspicion.

But the Church, as Paul declares, is the community where these walls are torn down. It is where distinctions of bloodline, birthplace, and background are not erased, but reconciled- brought together under the reign of Christ. It is where enemies become neighbors and strangers become siblings.

This is not sentimental inclusivity. It is the radical reality of the cross, which made peace by

absorbing the violence of division and replacing it with the bond of grace.

The Church as Borderless People

Paul's vision in Ephesians 2 is one of a new social order, a global community rooted in a different kind of citizenship. He writes: "So then *you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God"* (Ephesians 2.19).

This is the scandal of the gospel: the Church has no national passport. Its citizenship is heavenly. Its unity is not grounded in shared language or culture, but in baptism and table fellowship. It speaks in many tongues. It wears many skins. It prays in many rhythms. But it bows to one Lord.

And this unity is not future tense. It is present. It is real. It is costly. And it must be embodied- especially in a world that wants to build walls, hoard resources, and weaponize difference.

Racial Hierarchies and the Heresy of Supremacy

Christian nationalism, particularly in the West, has not only accepted the divisions of empire- it has sacralized them. It has baptized white supremacy, enshrined racial hierarchy, and disguised structural violence as providence.

From the enslavement of Africans to the theft of indigenous land, from segregationalist theology to anti-immigrant fervor, Christian nationalism has created a theology of borders: a gospel for the powerful, a God for the dominant culture, a Church that blesses the walls instead of breaking them down.

This is a betrayal of Christ. The Church must not only oppose nationalism- it must also repent of its participation in the dividing walls of racism, colonialism, and economic exclusion. It must then listen to those it has silenced. It must remember that the Jesus it follows was brown-skinned, colonized, and executed by a militarized state.

A Community of Reconciliation, Not Assimilation

The gospel does not erase difference- it reconciles it. The goal of the Church is not to make everyone the same, but to create a space where difference is no longer a cause for exclusion. Where people do not have to give up their culture to belong. Where unity is not sameness, but shared allegiance to the crucified and risen Christ.

In this vision, the church becomes a preview of the new creation- a global, borderless people living in love across the lines that empire draws.

As Paul said, "*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer*

male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus: (Galatians 3.28). This was not a denial of identity- it was a denial of division as destiny.

III. The Global Body of Christ

Christian nationalism tells a very small story. It imagines the Church as a cultural extension of the nation- an echo of its history, a chaplain to its military, a guardian of its borders. It pictures Christianity in the image of the dominant culture, often Western, white, and male. But this is not the Church Jesus founded. It is a parody of the body of Christ, trimmed to fit inside national flags and imperial myths.

The true Church- the global Body of Christ- is far more beautiful, far more vast, and far more dangerous to empire than any nationalized faith. It speaks in thousands of languages, worships under tin roofs and cathedral domes, prays in jungles and deserts, and meets in catacombs and city squares. It is not bound by geography or politics. It is borderless, stateless, and unstoppable.

To be a Christian is to belong to this Church- not the Church of one's nation, race, or denomination, but the transnational communion of saints that stretches across time and space, from the persecuted to the powerful, from the martyrs of old to the marginalized of today.

The Church is Not American

It must be said plainly: the Church is not American. It never has been.

Nor is it Western. Not white. Nor modern. Christianity was born in the global south, spread across Africa and Asia long before it became entangled with European power, and today thrives most vibrantly outside the Western world.

- The fastest-growing churches are in China, Nigeria, Brazil, and Iran.
- African theologians, Latin American liberationists, and Asian house church leaders are shaping the future of Christian witness.
- The majority of Christians in the world today are women of color in the global South.

This is the Church. Not the curated image of nationalism, but the living body of Christ- crucified and risen among the poor, the oppressed, and the globally displaced.

Rejecting American Exceptionalism in Theology and Missions

Christian nationalism in America often claims that the United States has a unique, divinely ordained role in redemptive history- a "city on a hill," a chosen nation tasked with spreading God's values by force, trade, or war.

This ideology infects missions, politics, and theology:

- It assumes American culture is closest to Christian truth.
- It exports Western capitalism as if it were the gospel.
- It silences the voices of non-Western Christians, treating them as recipients of truth, not as bearers of it.

But this is not Christian mission- it is cultural imperialism with a cross painted on top. And it must be repented of.

The Church in America must learn to sit at the feet of believers in Palestine, in Uganda, in Colombia. It must be converted- not to a foreign culture, but to the global reality of the Body of Christ.

Solidarity with the Persecuted and the Poor

To belong to the global Church is to be in solidarity with the suffering- not as an act of charity, but as a recognition of shared identity. When one part of the body suffers, all suffer. When Christians in Gaza are bombed, or in Nigeria are kidnapped, or in North Korea are imprisoned, we do not respond with indifference- we respond with intercession, advocacy, and action.

This solidarity is not just emotional- it's political. It means we refuse to align ourselves with empires that bomb, displace, or marginalize the very Christians we are united with in Christ.

It also means we resist every theology that assumes suffering is only a mark of failure or lack of blessing. In much of the global Church, faith is marked not by prosperity, but by perseverance. In fact, it is often in persecution that the Church becomes most faithful.

Listening to Voices from the Margins

Theology must no longer be a monologue from the West to the rest. It must be a global conversation, led not by empires, but by margins.

We must learn from:

- The African theologians who interpret Scripture through the lens of communal life, oral wisdom, and liberation.
- The Latin American pastors who read the Exodus through the eyes of the oppressed.
- The Asian believers who follow Jesus in the shadows of authoritarian regimes.
- The indigenous Christians who remind us that the earth is sacred, and that colonization is not evangelism
- The prophetic witness of Black Christians in America echoing the biblical call for liberation, justice, and righteousness.

These voices are not exotic footnotes. They are essential witnesses. They teach us what the gospel looks like when it is free from state power, capitalist seduction, and colonial assumptions.

To be part of the global Body of Christ is not just to accept these voices, but to de-center our own.

IV. Faithfulness Over Patriotism

Christian nationalism thrives on blurred lines. It loves a church that confuses platform with piety, that equates loyalty to the nation with loyalty to God. In such a framework, the ideal Christian is not the one who loves most deeply, or sacrifices most freely, or serves the least of these, but the one who stands for the anthem, supports the troops, and pledges allegiance without hesitation.

But Scripture offers no category for this kind of divided loyalty. Jesus never said to give to Caesar your heart. He never told his disciples to blend in, be loyal citizens, or prove their worth through national pride. What he demanded was singular: "Follow Me." And he made clear that following him would sometimes put his people in direct conflict with their nation, their tribe, even their families (Matthew 10.34-39).

In the kingdom of God, faithfulness always outranks patriotism.

The Nation Will Always Ask for More

Patriotism, left unchecked, will always become a rival religion. It will demand not just respect, but worship. The state does not settle for second place. Eventually, it will demand sacrifice- of truth, of conscience, even of the gospel itself.

And the Church, if it is not rooted in Christ alone, will comply. It will trade prophets for politicians. It will justify injustice for the sake of "stability." It will silence dissent in the name of unity. It will crucify its own Savior to preserve its place in the empire.

This is not a hypothetical. It has happened before.

- In Nazi Germany, churches that aligned with the state helped bless genocide.
- In the American South, Christians defended segregation with Bibles in hand.
- In apartheid South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church sanctified white rule.
- Today, across the world, nationalist movements still seek religious legitimacy from compliant churches.

The pattern is always the same: the nation asks for loyalty, and the Church must choose whether to comply- or resist.

Prophetic Faith is Often Unpatriotic

The prophets of Israel were rarely celebrated. They were scorned, imprisoned, or killed- not because they challenged its subservience to

political power. They told kings the truth. They exposed corruption. They spoke of a kingdom that could not be bought or weaponized.

Jesus stood in this same line. His first sermon nearly got him thrown off a cliff- not because he blasphemed, but because he dared to say that God's mercy extended beyond Israel (Luke 4.24-30). His ministry was not apolitical- it was dangerously political, because it confronted the lies of national chosenness, militarized messianism, and economic oppression. And it cost him his life.

Today, a faithful Church must recover this prophetic courage. It must be willing to speak truth to its own nation- not to destroy it, but to call it to repentance. And it must expect resistance, misunderstanding, and rejection.

Because the kingdom of God is not a patriotic project. It is a prophetic presence.

When the State Conflicts With the Cross

The early Church knew where its allegiance lay. When Rome demanded worship, they refused. When Caesar offered peace through violence, they said Christ alone is our peace. When the empire proclaimed that there is no other name but Caesar's, they declared, "Jesus is Lord."

This wasn't political posturing- it was faithful resistance. Likewise, today, there are moments when the state demands what Christ forbids:

- When the nation deports the stranger, while Christ commands us to welcome.
- When the government wages war, while Christ calls us peacemakers.
- When leaders sow division, while Christ commissions us as ministers of reconciliation.
- When power crushes the weak, while Christ is found among them.

In such moments, the church must not hesitate. it must say with the apostles: "*We must obey God rather than any human authority*" (Acts 5.29).

Examples of Costly Allegiance

History is filled with stories of those who chose faithfulness over patriotism- and paid the price:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who rejected Nazi nationalism and died resisting it.
- Martin Luther King Jr., who called America to repentance and was assassinated for his gospel vision.
- Oscar Romero, who stood with the poor of El Salvador and was gunned down at the altar.
- Wang Yi, a Chinese pastor who refuses to let the government rewrite the gospel, now serving a prison sentence for his witness.

These are not anomalies. They are true patriots of the kingdom of God. They loved their people- not by blessing national myths, but by confronting them in the name of Christ. Their faithfulness bore the cost of disobedience to empire.

This is what it means to belong to a kingdom not of this world.

V. One People, One Table

If there is one image that shatters the lie of Christian nationalism, it is this: a simple table, bread broken, a cup passed, people gathered- poor and rich, Black and white, refugee and citizen, left and right- sitting as equals, not because of their nation, but because of their Christ.

The Lord's Table is not a ritual. It is a revolution. It declares that in a world of division, violence, and hierarchy, the most powerful act is not conquest, but communion. The Eucharist is not only spiritual nourishment; it is a protest against the politics of exclusion. It levels the playing field. It unmasks every empire. It tells the truth about who we really are: a people bound not by blood and soil, but by the body and blood of Jesus.

The Eucharist as Political Resistance

In the early Church, to celebrate the Eucharist was a dangerous political act. It meant gathering

in defiance of Caesar's lordship. It meant proclaiming another kingdom, another peace, another table- one where the poor were honored, the outcast welcomed, and the powerful humbled.

This is why Paul is so outraged in Corinth when the rich ate first and the poor were left with nothing (1 Corinthians 11). To violate the table was to violate the very nature of the gospel.

And this is why, even today, the Eucharist remains a direct affront to nationalism:

- It refuses to segregate by race or citizenship.
- It centers the crucified Christ, not the conquering hero.
- It calls us not to kill for Christ, but to remember the one who was killed for us.
- It replaces border walls with open doors, pride with humility, conquest with communion.

To come to the Lord's Table is to reject the altars of empire.

Hospitality as Resistance

Hospitality is the politics of the kingdom. It is how the Church practices its rejection of borders. In a world that divides, excludes, and fences people out, the Church must open its doors, expand its tables, and invite in those who have been told they do not belong.

- In this way, hospitality is more than kindness- it is resistance.
- It resists nationalism by welcoming the immigrant, the stranger.
- It resists racism by centering the marginalized.
- It resists empire by practicing a love that knows no borders.

The early church was known for this. It took in abandoned infants. It fed the hungry. It welcomed slaves and foreigners into its leadership. It broke every cultural rule about who could eat together- and this, more than anything else, revealed the kingdom.

Today's Church must recover that scandalous generosity. The most faithful response to Christian nationalism is not just protest- it is a community where the walls are gone and the table is wide.

Living the Kingdom Now

To be a Christian is not to wait for the kingdom. It is to love it- here and now, in our neighborhoods, our churches, our homes.

- When we gather around tables instead of rallying around flags, we are living the kingdom.
- When we center the voices of the oppressed instead of echoing the powerful, we are living the kingdom.

- When we cross the lines drawn by empire- racial, national, economic- and embrace one another as siblings in Christ, we are living the kingdom.

This is not theoretical. It is as real as bread in hand and wine on the tongue.

And it is more powerful than any empire, because it is rooted in resurrection, not conquest. It is a politics that cannot be voted in or bombed out. It is what the world most desperately needs- a people who live as if Jesus really is Lord, and who gather every week to remember the meal that makes them one.

Conclusion: The Table is the Borderless Center

At the center of the church is not a flag, a platform, or a throne. It is a table.

And around that table, there is room for all. Not because the Church is soft, but because God is gracious. Not because it has no convictions, but because its deepest conviction is that all are welcome at the feast of the Lamb.

To sit at this table is to renounce every false identity. To share this meal is to commit to one another across every line. To break this bread is to remember that we are one Body. In every nation, every tribe, every tongue.

And no empire can divide what Christ has made one.

Chapter Twelve
Toward a Stateless Christianity

I. The Church Was Never Meant to Rule

The Church of Jesus Christ was born without a country. It had no army to defend it, no law to enforce it, and no ruler to protect it. It was a community of strangers and outcasts, scattered across the Roman Empire- often hidden, often hunted, but bound together by a singular confession: Jesus is Lord.

This Lord, however, came not to reign from a throne, but to die on a cross. He established no capital city. He issued no decrees of conquest. He did not organize a state. Instead, he called together a people who would embody his kingdom in the shadow of the world's empires, not as conquerors, but as witnesses. Not with swords, but with towels and bread and open hands.

This is the Church's origin story. And yet, for much of history, the Church has forgotten it.

Christianity Before Constantine

For the first three centuries of its life, the Church existed as a stateless people. It had no official recognition, no political power, and no legal protection. Its members met in homes, tombs, and caves. They endured marginalization, suspicion, and at times, state-sponsored persecution.

And yet, this was an explosive period of growth in Christian history.

The church grew not through force or favor, but through faithful presence- by caring for the sick, rescuing abandoned children, feeding the hungry, and loving their enemies. It was a movement of the marginalized, offering dignity to slaves, women, and foreigners in a society that treated them as disposable.

The early Christians had no illusions of national greatness. They were citizens of another kingdom, awaiting the day when Christ would return- not to anoint Caesar, but to finish what the cross began.

The Corruption of Christendom

Everything changed with Constantine. When the emperor claimed a vision of the cross and granted the church political legitimacy, it was hailed as a miracle. Persecution ended. Churches were built. Bishops gained prestige. Christianity moved from the margins to the center.

But with that power came a terrible cost. The Church that once suffered for the truth now wielded power in its name. The persecuted became the persecutors. The cross was etched onto swords and standards. The faith of the martyrs was replaced with imperial religion, where allegiance to Christ and loyalty to the state became indistinguishable.

This is the birth of Christendom- not the triumph of the gospel, but the assimilation of the church into empire. And it has haunted Christianity ever since.

From the Crusades to colonization, from inquisitions to state churches, the history of Christian entanglement with power is a history of compromise, violence, and betrayal. It is the story of a Church that forgot it was never meant to rule.

The Church Loses Its Soul When It Gains the Sword

The seduction of power is subtle. It promises influence, protection, even the ability to "do good." But whenever the church gains the sword, it loses the cross.

Jesus was offered political power in the wilderness and rejected it. He told Peter to put away his sword in the garden. He rode a donkey, not a war horse. He submitted to execution rather than call down angels. And he warned his disciples: "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...It will not be so among you*" (Matthew 20.25-26).

The Church forgets this at its peril. When Christians seek to rule, they become indistinguishable from the rulers of this world. When they trade the basin for the ballot box, the bread for a ballot initiative, the gospel for a

political platform, they lose the very thing that made the church a revolutionary force: its refusal to imitate the empire.

Recovering the Stateless Identity of the Church

To move toward a stateless Christianity is not to reject public life, civic responsibility, or love for one's neighbor. It is to recover the vocation of exile, to remember that the Church is most itself when it is not in power, but when it bears witness to a power not of this world.

It is to renounce the desire to control history and to embrace the call to suffer in hope. It is to say, with Paul, *"But our citizenship is in heaven"* (Philippians 3.20). It is to live as a people under no flag but the Lamb's, carrying no weapon but love, claiming no territory but the human heart.

In this light, the Church does not need a state. It does not need state power to validate it, nor political endorsement to thrive. It simply needs to be faithful to Christ- and that is more than enough.

II. Stateless Doesn't Mean Powerless

When the Church lets go of the state, it often fears becoming irrelevant. What will happen if we lose our seat at the table? What if we can't pass laws, influence elections, or protect ourselves? These are the questions of a Church addicted to

power, unsure whether the gospel alone is enough.

But stateless does not mean powerless. In fact, when the Church is untangled from empire, it becomes most powerful- not in the worldly sense of dominance or coercion, but in the Spirit-filled, cruciform power that comes from deep faithfulness.

The early Christians had no political leverage, no legal status, and no cultural prestige. And yet, they turned the world upside down- not by seizing power but by living a new way of being human in the middle of empire.

Moral Authority Over Political Control

There is a kind of power that comes not from commanding armies or passing legislation, but from bearing witness with such clarity and courage that the world cannot ignore you. It's the power of moral authority- of integrity, truth-telling, and sacrificial love.

This was the power that animated the prophets, who stood against kings and empires with only a word from God. It was the power that compelled the martyrs to sing in the face of death. It was the power that made the early Church such a threat to Rome- not because they were plotting revolution, but because they lived a kingdom that made Caesar look small.

When the Church trades this moral authority for political advantage, it always ends up compromising both. But when it renounces coercive power, it becomes dangerously free- free to speak the truth, to confront injustice, to welcome the outcast, and love the enemy.

This is the power the world needs.

Jesus Rejected the Politics of Control

Jesus refused the offer of kingdoms in the wilderness, fled from crowds who would make him a king, rode a donkey instead of a warhorse, and told Peter to put down his sword.

Jesus' power was not in control, but in surrender. His throne was a cross. His victory was resurrection. His influence came not from commanding history, but from laying down his life in the middle of it.

To follow Jesus is to embrace this paradox: power comes through powerlessness. Influence comes through faithfulness. The kingdom comes not with fanfare, but like yeast in dough, like a seed in the ground, like a whisper in the wind.

The Strength of Cruciform Witness

A stateless Church is not weak- it is liberated. It is no longer beholden to political parties, national myths, oppressive religious institutions, or the

idolatry of relevance. It can speak freely. It can serve generously. It can live prophetically.

This is the power of cruciform witness: a strength that endures suffering without hate, that absorbs injustice without retaliation, that creates community without coercion.

When the Church lives in this way:

- It confounds the logic of empires.
- It heals what nations divide.
- It becomes a signpost to a better world.

This is not idealism. It is what has sustained the Church in every era when it has been persecuted, ignored, or attacked. It is what makes the gospel good news- not because it promises control, but because it reveals a different kind of power, rooted in love and made perfect in weakness.

III. The Temptation of Theocracy

The dream of a "Christian nation" is as old as Christendom. It promises safety, stability, and morality enforced by law. It promises a world where God's name is honored in public, where Christian values shape society, and where the church no longer has to fight for a place in the cultural conversation- because it sits at the head of the table.

But the dream of theocracy is a seduction, not a calling. It mistakes control for holiness, coercion for conversion, and domination for discipleship. It

turns the gospel from an invitation into an imposition, and the cross from a symbol of suffering into a badge of supremacy.

Whenever the Church seeks to rule as a political regime, it loses what makes it holy. Theocracy is not the kingdom of God- it is the idolatry of a kingdom made in our own image, baptized in Scripture but driven by fear, control, and nostalgia.

"Christian Nations" Are Neither Christian Nor of Christ

History shows us what so-called Christian nations have produced:

- The Crusades, where soldiers massacred in the name of Christ.
- Colonialism, where missionaries rode with conquerors and conversions came at the end of a sword.
- Slavery, segregation, apartheid, and genocide, all justified with verses torn from Scripture and applied to systems of racial dominance.

These were not aberrations- they were the logical outcome of a Church married to state power.

No nation can be truly Christian because nations are built on borders, violence, on exclusion and hierarchy- all of which stand in contradiction to the

kingdom of God. A nation may have Christians in it. It may even protect religious freedom. But it cannot be "of Christ" unless it is willing to die, forgive, and love its enemies.

That is not how nations work. That is how the Church works.

Legislated Morality Cannot Save

The temptation of theocracy is to believe that morality can be legislated- that if we just pass the right laws, elect the right leaders, and enforce the right policies, we can create a Godly society.

But the kingdom of God cannot be voted in. It cannot be imposed from above. It must be lived into from below.

Jesus never sought to legislate righteousness. He preached it. He lived it. He embodied it in a community of the broken and the beloved. He knew that hearts cannot be changed by force, only by love. The law can restrain behavior, but only grace can transform lives.

The more the Church depends on political power to do its work, the more it forgets how to be the Church.

Coerced Faith is Not Faith

At the heart of theocracy is a dangerous lie: that faith can be mandated. But faith cannot be forced. The moment it is compelled, it ceases to be faith

at all. The gospel is not a system to be enforced by the state- it is an invitation to freedom. To believe, to repent, to follow Jesus- these are acts of the will, not of the sword.

That is why Jesus never called for laws, only for disciples. And this is why the early Church, even when persecuted, never demanded political privilege. They knew that the power of the gospel lies not in enforcement, but in witness.

The Church today must remember this. It must resist every impulse to control, coerce, or compel. The only power it needs is the power of the cross.

Separation of Church and State as a Theological Necessity

Too often, Christians think of the separation of Church and state as a secular idea- a legal accommodation to pluralism. But it is more than that. It is a theological safeguard.

The separation of Church and State protects the gospel from being hijacked by empire. It keeps the Church free to speak prophetically, love sacrificially, and serve without compromise. It keeps the cross from being used as a weapon and Jesus from being made into a mascot for state power.

A stateless Church is not a silent Church. It is a faithful Church, one that knows its voice is clearest

when it is not shouting from the throne, but whispering from the margins.

IV. Living As Resident Aliens

The New Testament consistently describes followers of Jesus not as rulers of the land, but as exiles, sojourners, ambassadors, and aliens (1 Peter 2.11; Hebrews 11.13; 2 Corinthians 5.20). These metaphors are not accidental. They reveal something essential about the Church's identity: It is not at home in any nation. It is a people in the world, but not of it- a community whose true citizenship lies elsewhere.

To be Christian is to be unsettled in empire. It is to walk through this world with deep love for its people but no illusions about its powers. It is to refuse both withdrawal and assimilation- to neither flee from the world nor be formed by it. It is to live, as Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon have said, as resident aliens: embedded in the world but belonging to another.

Exiles, Not Owners

God's people have always been a people in exile. From Abraham's sojourn to Israel's captivity in Babylon, from the scattered Church under Rome, to the underground church in totalitarian states today, the normal condition of the faithful is not control, but displacement.

This is not a punishment- it is a calling. In Jeremiah 29, God instructs the exiles in Babylon not to fight for domination, but to seek the peace of the city. They were not told to overthrow Babylon or to baptize it, but to live faithfully within it, bearing witness to a kingdom beyond it.

Likewise, Christians today are called to live as creative minorities- not to withdraw from public life, but to inhabit it with a different set of values, rooted in the reign of Christ. We live in nations, but we do not belong to them. Our allegiance is higher. Our hope is elsewhere.

Ambassadors of Another Kingdom

Paul calls the church "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5.20). Ambassadors do not adopt the culture of the host nation. They live as representatives of another country. They speak on behalf of a foreign king. Their conduct, their message, and their mission are shaped not by their environment, but by their identity.

To be a Christian, then, is to be a diplomatic presence of the kingdom of God in the midst of empire. It is to live as one sent from elsewhere-not to dominate, but to invite. Not to convert the nation into the Church, but to show the nation what the Church really is.

This means speaking differently, spending differently, and relating differently. It means

showing hospitality where the state builds walls. It means embracing sacrifice where the culture demands comfort. It means loving the enemy in a world obsessed with payback.

Political Engagement Without Idolatry

Living as resident aliens does not mean political indifference. It does not mean we retreat from public life or abandon our responsibilities as neighbors, voters, and advocates for justice. But it does mean we engage politically as Christians first- not as partisans, patriots, or power-seekers.

We do not look to political parties to represent the gospel. We do not confuse legislative victories with spiritual renewal. We remember that no nation is the kingdom of God, and no politician is the messiah.

This frees us to speak the truth to all sides, to hold every power accountable, and to protect the vulnerable without compromising our witness. It allows us to be politically active but spiritually un-entangled, faithful in presence, but never seduced by power.

Hospitable Presence Without Domination

Resident aliens do not dominate- they welcome. They do not impose their culture- they invite others to experience a better way. This is the

heart of the Church's political posture: not conquest, but hospitality.

- In a world of walls, we open doors.
- In a world of scarcity, we share bread.
- In a world of fear, we create safe space.
- In a world of dominance, we serve.

This kind of presence is not loud, but it is powerful. It speaks volumes. It declares that another kingdom is already here, breaking in through every act of faithfulness, mercy, and truth.

V. Imagining the Stateless Church

What might the Church become if it let go of the dream of ruling? What would it look like to live not as the religious wing of the state, nor as an arm of ideology, but as the radically faithful, borderless, stateless body of Christ?

This is not utopian speculation- it is a return to the Church's original identity. Before Constantine, before Christendom, before political alliances and flag-draped sanctuaries, the Church was a grassroots movement of resurrection people. It gathered in hidden places. It loved the poor. It defied the empire with nothing but bread, wine, and the Spirit of God.

Today, in a world once again disillusioned with power, perhaps the Church's greatest act of

resistance is to be itself, un-bought, untamed, and unbound.

The Church as a Sanctuary, Not a Stronghold

A stateless Church is not a fortress. It is a sanctuary. It does not posture from a place of dominance but opens its doors to the world's wounded. It is not obsessed with protecting itself but with healing others. It does not preach nationalism disguised as theology but welcomes people from every tribe and nation to come and see a better way.

Imagine churches that operate like cultural gatekeepers but like refugee clinics for the soul. Not chapels of empire, but sanctuaries of grace. Places where the undocumented are embraced, where the poor are not just served but seen, where those burned by politicized religion find rest and renewal.

This is not fantasy. In many places- urban shelters, immigrant churches, underground gatherings- this Church already exists. It simply needs to be lifted up and multiplied.

Borderless Communion and Global Identity

This Church is not defined by national boundaries. It is one body, global and local, held together not by language, passport, or policy- but by the presence of Christ.

To be a stateless Church means to prioritize communion over citizenship, and solidarity over sovereignty. It means we identify first and foremost with believers in Palestine, in Congo, in Myanmar- not because we share political interests, but because we share a resurrected Lord.

This global identity demands:

- That we reject national favoritism in our theology.
- That we listen to the global Church with humility, not paternalism.
- That we see the gospel not as an export, but as a shared inheritance.

In this sense of borderless belonging that can break the spell of nationalism once and for all.

Local Communities of Resistance and Resurrection

The stateless Church may not have state power, but it has something greater: the power to embody the kingdom of God in every neighborhood and nation.

This happens in small, faithful ways:

- Communities that practice forgiveness in a culture of vengeance.
- Churches that share resources in a world of hoarding.

- Christians who cross racial, political, and economic lines to worship and serve together.
- Leaders who refuse to baptize empire and instead kneel to wash feet.

These acts may seem insignificant. But they are seeds of new creation, signs of a kingdom already present and yet to come.

They remind the world that Jesus did not build an institution to manage nations- he built a people to transform them, not by force, but by the Spirit.

Letting the State be the State- and the Church be the Church

The state will always do what the state does: draw borders, enforce laws, protect interests, and wield the sword.

But the church must never forget what only it can do: preach good news to the poor, release the captive, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

The state's power is limited, but the Church's witness is eternal.

It does not need to rule to be relevant. It does not need favor to be faithful. It does not need protection to endure.

It only needs to be what Christ called it to be: a city on a hill, a light in the darkness, a body broken and shared for the life of the world.

Chapter Thirteen
A Better Hope (Conclusion)

I. The Wreckage of the Present Age

We have walked through the wreckage. The story this book has told is not a triumphant one. It is the story of a Church seduced by empire, of a gospel twisted by nationalism, of sacred things made profane by power and pride. From Rome to Washington, from Wittenberg to Jerusalem, we have traced an **unholy alliance-** between altar and flag, between theology and conquest, between God and Caesar.

And what has it brought us?

- A gospel that blesses bombs and borders.
- A Church more interested in winning elections than washing feet.
- A theology that justifies domination and silences dissent.
- A public witness that often sounds more like empire than exile, more like Caesar than Christ.

The alliances forged in fear and power have left the Church compromised and hollow. It has gained the world and forfeited its soul.

But the end of that story is not the end of our story. God is not finished.

Disillusionment as a Doorway to Hope

We do not begin this final chapter with triumph, but with disillusionment. And that is exactly where Christian hope begins.

Jurgen Moltmann reminds us that true hope is born from contradiction. It emerges not in comfort, but in crisis. Not in the victory of the strong, but in the suffering of the oppressed. Hope arises not because things are fine, but because they are not as they should be, and because God has promised they will not remain that way. Hope begins where possibilities end.

To be disillusioned with Christian nationalism is not defeat- it is liberation. It is the beginning of repentance. It is the soil in which a better Church can grow. It means we are ready to stop pretending that empire and gospel can live in peace and instead open our hands to something new.

The Collapse of Empire as Theological Opportunity

The unraveling of Christian nationalism is not the unraveling of Christianity. In fact, it may be its salvation. What we are witnessing in this moment- this political chaos, this deconstruction of faith, this generational exodus from institutional religion- is not just decline. It is judgment. But it is also invitation.

God is shaking what can be shaken, so that only what cannot be shaken may remain (Hebrews 12.27). The idols are falling. The false hopes are cracking. And beneath the rubble, something deeper is beginning to stir.

That is what Moltmann calls a theology of hope against hope. It is a theology born at the foot of the cross, forged in exile, and anchored in the future God has promised but not yet fulfilled.

We do not put our hope in nations.

We do not put our hope in leaders.

We do not put our hope in the Church as it currently exists.

We put our hope in the God who comes- not to endorse what is, but to make all things new.

II. Hope is Not Optimism- It is Resistance

Christian hope is not naive. It does not wear rose-colored glasses or make peace with injustice for the sake of false comfort. It is not an opiate, a fantasy, or a coping mechanism for the powerless. Hope, in the vision of Jurgen Moltmann, is resistance. It is the refusal to accept the world as it is, because we have seen, through the cross and resurrection- the world as it will be.

"Hope alone is to be called 'realistic', because it alone takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught."- Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope.*

The resurrection of Jesus was not the validation of the world's power structures. It was God's "No" to empire, death, and despair, and simultaneously God's resounding "Yes" to a future no empire could control. Christian hope does not ignore suffering- it emerges from it, and it insists that suffering and death will not have the last word.

Resurrection as Protest

The resurrection is not just a personal promise; it is a political protest. It is a divine interruption to the logic of domination. It is the first eruption of a coming future in which the crucified are vindicated, the oppressed are lifted up, and the dead are raised- not to continue the old world, but to begin a new one.

Christian hope does not begin in the garden, but in the tomb. This means our hope is most alive:

- When empire thinks it has won.
- When the Church is in exile.
- When the powerful mock resurrection and the world scorns the cross.

Christian hope looks at Golgotha and refuses to be quiet. It believes that even at history's lowest point, especially there, God is at work. It believes that God's future invades the present not with fanfare, but with scars.

Hope as the Engine of Transformation

Moltmann insists that hope is not simply about the future- it is about living differently now because of the future we expect.

"Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it."- *Theology of Hope.*

Hope is what prevents accommodation. It is what keeps the Church from giving in to despair or from making peace with empire. When we believe that God is truly coming- not just spiritually, but historically, cosmically, and physically- then we live now as if that future is already breaking in.

- We feed the hungry not because it solves everything now, but because in the kingdom, no one will be hungry.
- We resist injustice not because we think we will win, but because God has already judged the powers.
- We practice enemy love, open tables, and radical hospitality, not because the world rewards it, but because the world to come demands it.

Hope empowers us to live the future in the present.

The Church as a Community of Hopeful Defiance

This is why the Church cannot be a chaplain to empire. Its vocation is not to reflect the values of

the state but to contradict them in the name of the coming kingdom.

The Church is not conservative in the sense of preserving what is. It is radically hopeful in the sense of anticipating what will be. It must always be more loyal to the future God has promised than to the past it remembers. It must not merely criticize the world- it must live out a new one, in miniature, in witness, in flesh and blood.

This is the Church's power- not to dominate, but to disrupt. Not to retreat, but to proclaim with boldness that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again- not to bless the nations, but to judge them, heal them, and redeem all things.

III. The Church of the Future Now

If the resurrection is the beginning of God's future breaking into the present, then the Church is meant to be the community that lives from that future into the now. It is not an institution of nostalgia or national memory, but a prophetic people drawn forward by the promises of God, animated by the coming kingdom, and committed to enacting a different reality in the midst of the world's despair.

Moltmann describes the Church not as a fortress of tradition, but as a laboratory of hope- a place where the Spirit creates new life that contradicts

the deathliness of the world. The Church is called to anticipate what God will do by embodying it now.

The Church of the exodus and the resurrection is a Church of hope. She goes her way, neither conforming to the present age nor yearning for a vanished past, but living in the power of the coming Lord. The Church is to live as if the kingdom has already come- because in Christ, it has.

A People From the Future

What kind of people would we be if we truly believed that history ends not in ruin, but in resurrection? That the future belongs not to Caesar, but to the Lamb?

We would be a people of:

- Nonviolence in a world addicted to domination.
- Generosity in a culture of scarcity and extraction.
- Hospitality in a time of walls and fear.
- Joyful defiance in the face of despair.

We hope because we expect God. We act because we believe he is coming. This hopeful expectation gives the Church its peculiar identity- not just as a moral community or social service provider, but as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the world to come.

The Church is not the kingdom- but it is called to witness to it, like John the Baptist crying in the wilderness, like the early believers gathering in catacombs, like today's persecuted Church worshiping in the ruins of empire.

Communities of Resistance and Resurrection

To live from the future means forming communities now that resist the logic of empire and embody the life of the kingdom.

This means:

- Worship that centers the crucified and risen Jesus, not the nation or the ruler.
- Economies of sharing, where possessions are held in common and the poor are lifted up.
- Radical reconciliation, where enmity is dismantled and the body of Christ is healed across divisions.
- Prophetic presence, where the Church names the idols of its age- not to condemn the world, but to summon it toward life.

These communities don't always look impressive. They don't always grow large or win favor. But they are living proofs of the Spirit's work, fermenting like yeast in dough, breaking through like light at dawn.

Rejecting the Past's Dominion

To be the Church of the future now is also to be unbound from the past's dominion. This is especially important for Christians emerging from the ruins of Christian nationalism and Christendom.

We are not called to preserve the legacy of the "Christian West." We are not defined by Constantine, by colonialism, or by the centuries of state-sanctioned Christianity that came before us.

We are defined by Christ crucified and risen, and by the future he inaugurates- a future in which "the former things have passed away" and the new creation has come.

As Moltmann warns, a Church obsessed with the past becomes a tomb. A Church gripped by God's future becomes a witness, a signpost, and a sanctuary.

IV. Faithfulness in the Time Between

We live in the time between. Between resurrection and return. Between the collapse of false hopes and the arrival of the true one. Between the death of empire and the full arrival of the kingdom of God.

Moltmann calls this the eschatological tension- the "already" and the "not yet." Christ is risen, but death still haunts us. The Spirit has been poured out, but the nations still rage. The Church has

been called out of empire, but empire still whispers in its ears.

It is here, in this in-between place, that we are called to faithfulness. Not triumph. Not conquest. Not even success by worldly standards. Just faithfulness.

Faithfulness is Not Quietism

To be faithful does not mean being passive. It does not mean resignation. It means active, persistent hope expressed in tangible love, in bold speech, and in enduring solidarity with the crucified of the world.

In Moltmann's theology, the Church does not wait idly. It participates in the coming of God by aligning itself with that which is already being made new:

- We comfort the mourning because joy is coming.
- We free the oppressed because justice is coming.
- We build peace because the Prince of Peace is coming.
- We love enemies because the reign of reconciliation is coming.

Hope does not remove us from history- it roots us more deeply in it. Because God is coming, we stay in the world, shoulder to shoulder with the

suffering, resisting the powers, planting gardens even in exile.

The Church as Midwife of God's Future.

Moltmann envisions the Church as a midwife of the new creation. We cannot bring the kingdom by force, but we can prepare the way. We can groan with creation, labor with love, and hold space for a reality that has not yet fully arrived- but it is already real.

To be a midwife is:

- To trust that something new is coming, even when all you see is pain.
- To act in hope, not certainty.
- To stay present throughout the long night of labor, even when others flee.
- To welcome life when it arrives, in humility and joy.

In a world captivated by the spectacle of power, this work will look small. It will look foolish. But it is divine work, because it participates in God's unfolding promise.

Guarding Against Cynicism and Compromise

The time between is dangerous. Not just because the empire persists, but because our hope can fade. We can be worn down by delay. We can be tempted to abandon the radical edge of

the gospel for more manageable versions: civil religion, partisan faith, cultural relevance.

But the Church must not trade hope for control. It must not compromise with the powers. It must not lose its eschatological imagination.

"Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward-looking and forward-moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present."- Moltmann, *Theology of Hope.*

If we forget the end, we lose our direction in the present. If we forget who is coming, we will serve those who already reign. Faithfulness means holding fast to the vision of the kingdom- not as an escape, but as the standard by which we measure everything else.

V. A Hope That Cannot Be Conquered

The hope we have been speaking of- this fierce, cruciform, future- breaking-into-the-present hope- is not a theory. It is not wishful thinking. It is not dependent on circumstances or success.

- It is rooted in a historical event: the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- It is sustained by a living promise: the coming of God.
- It is animated by the Holy Spirit, who whispers even now: *"Behold, I am making all things new*" (Revelation 21.5).

Christian nationalism will fail. All empires fail. All Caesars die. But the hope of the gospel is not fragile- it cannot be conquered.

- It has survived cathedrals turned into war rooms.
- It has endured inquisitions and colonizations, crusades, and compromises.
- It has been buried in mass graves and sung through prison walls.

And it rises again and again- on the lips of the poor, in the prayers of the exiled, in the quiet resistance of those who still believe in love.

The Cross and the End of Empire

The cross is not just where Jesus died- it is where empire died. Rome wielded its ultimate power- violence, spectacle, domination- and it failed. It could kill, but it could not conquer. The resurrection is God's verdict on the powers: you lose. And it is God's promise to the world: I will raise what you have crushed.

This is why Christian nationalism is not just heresy- it is a betrayal of hope. It seeks to resurrect the very powers Jesus overcame. It turns the Church away from the future and roots it in fear, nostalgia, and control.

But the true Church- the Church of Jesus, the church of the empty tomb- is not afraid. It is not

captive to the past. It does not need Caesar's blessing.

It lives toward a kingdom not made by hands, and it believes that the best is yet to come.

God is Returning to Vindicate Empire

Let us be clear: Jesus is not coming back to vindicate the Christian Right, or the Vatican, or any nationalist movement. He is not returning to reward the builders of Christian empires.

- He is coming to raise the crucified.
- To lift the broken.
- To heal the nations.
- To wipe every tear.
- To bring justice where justice has never been.
- To finish what he began when the stone rolled away.

This is the better hope:

- Not the triumph of the church over the world, but reconciliation of all things in Christ.
- Not the crowning of Christian rulers, but the liberation of the captives.
- Not the preservation of any nation, but the arrival of a kingdom that will never end.

Hope is the Final Word

We have seen the church seduced and compromised.

We have watched the gospel disfigured.
We have named the idols.
We have lamented the damage.
But we do not end in despair.

Moltmann is often quoted as saying, "God weeps with us so that we may one day laugh with him."

Hope has the last word.

Because Christ is risen.

Because the Spirit is still moving.

Because God is coming- not to restore Christendom, but to renew creation.

A Benediction for the Stateless Church

So to the exiles, the weary, the disillusioned, the defiant:

You are not lost.

You are not alone.

You are part of a Church the empire could not kill, and the future cannot ignore.

Hold fast,

Resist the seduction of power.

Live the kingdom now.

And wait- not in fear, but in hope.
Because the unholy alliances will fail.
And the crucified Christ will reign.

"The ultimate reason for our hope is not to be found at all in what we want, wish for, and wait for; the ultimate reason is that we are wanted and wished for and waited for...God is our last hope because we are God's first love."

Jurgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: the Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life.*

AMEN!